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BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“HIGH CHURCH,” “NO CHURCH,”

“OWEN: A WAIF,” “MATTIE: A STRAY,”

“CHRISTIE’S FAITH,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BOOK I.

LITTLE JENNY.

CHAPTER I.

THE TALLY-SHOP IN JUNCTION STREET.

IT was a wet winter. It was a warm, unhealthy winter, according to the papers and the Registrar's returns; but poor people, Spitalfields way, had a word to say in defence of it. Trades were a trifle slackish, perhaps—the weavers, in particular, were not rejoicing—but coals were moderate in price, and the bread was “down,” thank God. The “young uns” had not such appetites as usual, and that was an advantage; and they who were sick—sick unto death many of them in fever-haunted streets—had their medicine from the dispensary, and only cost their parents trouble, which even poor parents, as a rule, do not seem to mind.

Still, in this strangely-constituted world there are folk who are never satisfied; and Mr. Mar-

maduke Spanswick, of Junction Street, Spitalfields, had been heard more than once to murmur at the times. He told his customers—especially those who were back in their weekly payments—that such times never were, or, if they had been, that he had never known them; he discoursed eloquently upon the subject of arrears; to those from whom no hope of settlement was likely to arise, he was short and bitter; and to those who paid with punctuality and despatch, his speech was silver and as of fine music. In this he may not appear to deviate a great deal from the common order of creditors; but possibly the reader has not run-up a little bill at Spanswick's shop in Junction Street. Only those in debt to Spanswick were aware that his shortness and bitterness were peculiar to himself; and only those who paid their way ever fully appreciated his jovial airs and his fine, full-flavoured jests. Which was Mr. Spanswick's natural character we may discover in the course of our narrative, for it is not part of our vocation to label the gentleman as

a set-off. We shall drop in upon him one Saturday evening at half-past seven by the clock in the great steeple of Spitalfields church, and take him as we find him.

At half-past seven, then, in the January month of that damp winter, when salesmen were shouting themselves hoarse in Spitalfields Market adjacent, and all Spitalfields—in defiance of the drizzling rain, the weather, which was “muggy,” and the streets, which were “slushy”—was alive and restless. Saturday’s wages had been paid, Sunday’s dinners were to be purchased, the shops were full, the kerbstones were alive with hucksters, the police—under extra pressure of business engendered by public-house disputes, and men with barrows who would not move on so rapidly as could be wished—perspired under their iron-plated hats, which were then patent to the times.

It was the policeman at the corner of Junction Street whom Miss Christopherson buttonholed, at the very moment that he was making a good case out of a man with “herrings eight

a groat," and asked the way to Mr. Spanswick's.

"There it is, just across the way. And now, you sir, if you don't catch up that basket——"

"But I cannot see Mr. Spanswick's, my good officer, and I have been twice down the street already. May I trouble you to show me again?"

The policeman, struck by the speaker's voice, as by a something decisive and new to him in Junction Street, or by her courteous salutation to him as "officer," regarded more attentively the lady who had thus addressed him. She was a pale and pretty woman, of about twenty years of age, with large gray eyes; a woman of the middle height, slightly made, neatly and quietly dressed for general life, but rather a "swell" for Junction Street. She wore tightly-fitting kid-gloves, and her bonnet, which was not out of the fashion, was protected from the night's drizzle by a silk umbrella with a red-cornelian handle. The official saw at a glance that this was a person out of the common way to encounter on a Saturday night in one of the

busiest streets in Spitalfields. He was a shrewd fellow, who knew a lady when he saw one, and his second reply to her was more respectful and less vague.

“I’ll show you the shop, miss, if you’ll step across the road with me.”

“Thank you.”

The policeman escorted Miss Christopherson across the road, and through a maze of barrows and a crowd of folk out marketing, and landed her in safety on the other side.

“Is Junction Street always like this?” she asked, a little curiously; “always so many people, and—such strange-looking people?”

“Always like this on Saturdays, of course,” he answered. “There, this is Spanswick’s, miss.”

“Oh, dear, is it?” she said, hesitating for an instant as the great hand of the policeman pushed back a swing glass-door, and thus afforded a glimpse of a busy scene within.

The policeman noticed her hesitation.

“Is it anything I can be of use in?” he asked.

“No, thank you,” was the quick reply; and

then, after thanking him again for his services, Miss Christopherson, as though ashamed of past vacillation, stepped boldly into Mr. Spanswick's establishment.

Yes, they were very busy at Spanswick's. Mr. Spanswick was driving a good trade; and, to quote a favourite phrase of his, "was up to his eyes in it." There were thirty people in Spanswick's, and the shop was constructed to hold a dozen comfortably. They were talking energetically, or listening to voluble discourses as to quality, quantity, and price, from three smirk vulgar-looking young men behind the counter; they were pleading very earnestly to an older-looking man with a squint, who sat in a remote corner with a desk before him; they were struggling for places, wrangling amongst themselves for precedence, and adding still farther to the general inconvenience by huge market-baskets which three-fourths of them carried on their sides, and drove into the sides of other people. There was one specimen of the male sex amongst a battalion of dirty, slip-shod,

hollow-eyed female customers, a good-looking youth of sixteen or seventeen years of age, who appeared to be very much embarrassed, and very red and very poor. He was the only one to glance at Miss Christopherson as she entered, and to betray for an instant a considerable amount of surprise at her appearance, as if he had recognised her, or as if the presence of a lady at that time and place was to be wondered at by him.

Mr. Spanswick dealt in drapery goods, and, by way of supplement, in rickety washstands, small dressing-glasses, flaring oil-cloths and carpets, and drab chests of drawers with hideous black handles, all heaped together at one end of the shop, and representing the furniture department. Mr. Spanswick dealt in hardware, and wearing apparel for male and female also; indeed, it was difficult to determine in what he did not deal, or for what he was not disposed to receive money on account, or part with for weekly instalments, the purchaser taking away the goods if her husband were in full work, or she herself

could show the receipt for last week's rent. For the "Spitalfields Emporium"—this was the title Mr. Spanswick had had painted over his shop-front, and so had baffled for a while Miss Christopherson's search for him—was in the tally trade; and Mr. Spanswick, though he called himself a draper, a furniture dealer, and a carpet merchant, and disguised the fact to one or two friends as well as he was able in so unblushing a neighbourhood, was a tally-man.

A tally-man in a good way of business was he; a man doing well, for he worked early and late as a rule, though he had his little pleasures when opportunity offered, and who, when he was not in the shop between seven A.M. and nine P.M., was in all probability making his statement of facts before the presiding deity at the County Court in Whitechapel, where he had been known to take out, in hard times, three or four hundred summonses at once, and was generally so good a customer that, next to the judge, no one was respected more by the numerous functionaries attached to the establishment.

Mr. Spanswick himself was in his counting-house counting out his money, examining his bills, and not altogether neglectful of his customers, upon whom he could look down through the glass windows which divided him from the shop, and appeared to shut him in a snugger and more select business of his own. The counting-house at the back was raised a foot or two, and allowed Mr. Spanswick to survey clearly all that was passing below him: and there was a framed pane of glass that went on hinges, and enabled Mr. Spanswick to open it, and shout through those various directions to his men, or salutations to his customers, which appeared necessary in a business of many details and many patrons.

He must have watched there like a hawk, Miss Christopherson thought afterwards; for she had not been two minutes in the shop before the pane was flung back, and a loud voice called through the aperture with rough politeness,

“Will wait upon you in a minute, ma’am.”

Miss Christopherson was scarcely aware that it was she who had been addressed by the superior power, until lined and angular faces were turned in her direction. Then she glanced towards the little inner office, and saw a broad-faced, bushy-haired, bushy-whiskered man of one or two-and-thirty, bowing and smiling in the blandest manner at her.

“Thank you. I wish to——”

“In one minute, ma’am, you shall receive every attention,” he said, in the same loud tones, which floated uppermost over a sea of many voices; and then the glass trap was closed, the big face was bending over the accounts by the light of a lamp with a green reflector thereon, and the haggard countenances of the customers were turning once more towards her with strange interest.

Miss Christopherson made the best of her position after a while; she was a young woman capable of adapting herself to circumstances. She was in a new, strange world, but it was full of interest to her; and though Mr. Spans-

wick did not keep his promise by attending to her in the course of the next minute, she evinced no impatience at the delay.

She did not understand the nature of Mr. Spanswick's business at first, and was perplexed by the numerous dog's-eared, dirty memorandum-books which the customers passed across the counter, and wherein the seedy clerks made entries of weekly payments. She was puzzled by the eagerness and earnestness of the crowd before the counter, not knowing how valuable time was—especially Saturday-night's time—to these workmen's wives, whose husbands were waiting for them at the "Eleven Bells," or the "Angel's Crown," and would not know when to stop their "half-and-half" if they were not quickly fetched away. She was puzzled most of all by the youth whom she had first observed, and who had been surprised at her entrance; and gradually her study of him led her to forget Mr. Spanswick's want of punctuality.

He was a youth who was as much out of place as herself, for all his different estate, and

his approximation to that class by which he was surrounded. He was excited, he buttoned and unbuttoned his jacket with nervous hands, he endeavoured to attract the attention, being a tall youth, of the men behind the counter by standing on tiptoe and waving his book—for he also had a memorandum-book—above the shabby bonnets of the women in front of him; he looked round at Miss Christopherson several times wistfully, and blushed at meeting her curious gaze; he coughed, he shuffled with his feet, he glanced at a clock fixed over the furniture department, and he endeavoured to edge his way at last to the front, and was rewarded by a shower of cutting reproaches from two elderly ladies, who told him that he ought to know better than to go on “a-scrouging” like that.

“I’m very sorry,” he said, “but it is really my turn. It was my turn to be attended to half an hour since. I want to get out of this.”

To which mild expostulation the lady whom he was addressing—a sharp little woman, with

her bonnet all on one side—asked if he thought himself a man.

“I do not know that that is anything to do with the question,” he said, directing a half-laughing glance towards Miss Christopherson, as though he had been assured of her attention to the dispute; and then, suddenly becoming very red again, “but I really must arrange this little matter. I’ll not keep anybody long.”

Mr. Spanswick’s broad face suddenly popped itself through the trap, and the sharp voice called forth :

“I say, none of that; we’re not going to stand any rows here; you must wait your turn, young fellow.”

“But I have waited my turn. Are you Mr. Spanswick, sir?”

“Well, I was once,” said Mr. Spanswick, and the remark was taken as a joke by the women before and the young men behind the counter, who all laughed, but whether at the humour of the reply, or to keep Mr. Spanswick company, who was laughing himself, was a matter of

some doubt. Miss Christopherson fancied that he rolled his eyes towards her, to see if she were also laughing at his pleasantry; but her face wore a grave aspect, which did not change with other people's.

"I merely want to know whether I can settle Mrs. Bridge's account, sir, and open a fresh one; because," began the youth, when Mr. Spanswick interrupted him:

"I'm too busy to attend to you just now. Bridge, Bridge—let me see. Oh! you had better speak to Mr. Kayley."

He indicated Mr. Kayley, who was the gentleman with the squint sitting at a desk in the corner below him, and who was fortunately disengaged just then; and after another glance at Miss Christopherson, whose appearance had evidently impressed him, and a bland "One moment more, if you will allow me, madam," he closed the trap again, and was seen through his stuffy conservatory scratching his head over his accounts. The youth advanced to Mr. Kayley's desk, which was in approximation to Miss Chris-

topherson, who moved a few paces aside, lest she should be considered anxious to learn the reason for this youth's impetuosity. But she had not excluded herself from the dialogue between them, for Mr. Kayley spoke in a high sharp falsetto, and told the youth to speak up also, as he was a little deaf.

Mr. Kayley was not only a little deaf, Miss Christopherson thought, but also a little dirty. He was a thin old man, with a bald head, indifferently clean, and two lappets of gray hair, looking very like gray worsted, hanging behind his ears. His face was yellow, and puckered into innumerable wrinkles; and his linen collar and shirt were of a colour that so exactly matched his features, that the first impression of an observer was that he was dispensing with those articles of masculine apparel, for ease and coolness, that warm winter's night.

"Now, what is it?" he said, sharply; "and do speak out."

"It's Mrs. Bridge's account," replied the

youth, after an embarrassed, almost shamefaced glance at Miss Christopherson.

“Oh! it’s Mrs. Bridge’s account,” said Mr. Kayley, turning over several leaves of the great book before him. “Ah! we should have summoned Mrs. Bridge long ago, if we could have found her. She owes two pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence, I remember. Here it is—two pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence, Mrs. Deborah Bridge, 12 Grove Court, Pelham Street, Spitalfields, the last address.”

“It’s Star Court, No. 1, now.”

“Oh! is it? No. 1.” Mr. Kayley made a note of this at once.

“It would have been paid long ago. She was paying off very regularly—you may remember that too, Mr. Kayley—when she fell ill; and then I lost my situation; and I have not been able to get anything else until just now, when things, I hope, have taken a turn. I did not know of this account; I don’t like this way of doing business; and the poor old lady was aware of my objections, and kept the matter

from me as long as she could, until"—here he compressed his lips suddenly—"someone came from this place when I was out, luckily for him, and left a message."

"Why luckily for him?" inquired Mr. Kayley, with his head on one side.

"Well, we need not go into that," said the young man, looking as if he had said more than he had intended to say; "he wasn't civil; but I do not know the individual, and do not want; I have not called to complain."

"Have you come to pay anything off?" was the next question.

"Yes, I have."

"How much?"

"It's a question," was the answer. "I am very willing to pay off by weekly instalments, or to settle the whole amount, if you have no objection to my opening a fresh account. I think," he added, hesitatingly, "that I could pay it all."

"I thought that you did not like our way of doing business?"

“Neither do I,” said the youth, frankly: “it’s expensive for us, who have not the ready money to buy in a better market. But, for all that, we are in for it,” he added, ruefully.

“What goods do you want?”

“Well, I must have another blanket, and some flannel. The old lady is dying by inches of ague for the want of them; and I shall be able to go on regularly this time.”

“Where are you working?”

“At Merton’s, the brewers.”

A voice from above startled the clerk and the customer; they looked up, and the head of the presiding judge was again visible through the aperture.

“Ain’t it Mrs. Bridge, who gave us all that trouble, Kayley—Mrs. Bridge of Grove-court?” asked Mr. Spanswick.

“Yes, sir,” said Mr. Kayley, rising and raising his two hands to the bottom panes of Mr. Spanswick’s glass-house; “she’s come to Star-court; he’s going to pay off the lot—wants to open another account,—blankets and flannel; he—”

And here Mr. Kayley's voice dropped to an inaudible whisper, and Mr. Spanswick's head was seen to nod once or twice to Mr. Kayley's propositions.

"Very well.—One moment more, madam. You perceive it's Saturday night, and we hardly know where to turn, I assure you."

The latter part of this harangue was delivered to Miss Christopherson, who reddened at the bland persuasiveness of the speaker, and inclined her head very slightly, as if in assent to his argument. She was anxious to explain her business and be gone now; but it was impossible to explain at the top of her voice to a gentleman in an inner room, into which he did not seem inclined to invite her; and she was not able to address any of the assistants at present.

This time, however, Mr. Spanswick was as good as his word; for before the youth had settled the debt of the slow-paying Mrs. Bridge, Miss Christopherson was startled by finding the principal of the establishment at her elbow. He had left his room, descended a few steps,

and entered the shop by a side-door, whilst the lady was musing on that life around her, in which she had never thought to mix.

“Now, my dear madam, what can I have the pleasure of showing you?” he said, rubbing one fat white hand over the other.

He was a bigger and a heavier man than he had appeared at a distance through his conservatory—a man of an amazing chest, which was festooned by an amazing gold chain, weighing probably about three quarters of a pound. He was not a bad-looking man, but his features were on an uncomfortably large scale, like his chest and chain; his eyes were protuberant and stony, and his broad ruddy face was framed with such a mass of bristly whisker, and his broad forehead surmounted with so vigorous a crop of porcupine-quills rather than hair, that his general appearance was as hard, fierce, and unsympathetic as befitted his vocation, and defied all those specious manners which he put on to his best customers, and was displaying then to Miss Christopherson.

“You are Mr. Spanswick, I presume?”

“Such is my appellative, madam,” he replied, with a low bow.

“I am Miss Christopherson, from the City Clerks’ Orphan Asylum, Camberwell, and——”

“Oh, indeed!” he interrupted; and Miss Christopherson noticed that his eyes became more protuberant, and that an odd expression of surprise, almost of discomfiture, was visible for an instant on his open countenance. “Oh, indeed—Oh, indeed! Will you kindly step this way? Will you oblige me by stepping this way into my room? I must really apologise; I thought that you had come on business of the shop. Although I ought not to have thought that, either,” he added, with another polite bow, as he recovered himself suddenly, “knowing a lady, when I meet one, just as a real West-end gentleman might do, you see. Pray step this way.”

Running glibly on, he conducted Miss Christopherson through the side-door, up three stairs, and into his counting-house, shutting the door

after him, and taking care to pull the movable pane of glass close, lest Mr. Kayley's deafness might fail him all at once. He placed a chair for her, glanced furtively from her face to his customers below, many of whom were staring up at him and the lady thus honoured by a private interview, drew forth a silk handkerchief, wiped his forehead vigorously, sat himself down at his desk, and said,

"I am every attention, Miss Stufferson."

"Miss Christopherson."

"Miss Christopherson—I beg pardon," he said—"I am every attention. There—there is no bad news, I hope?"

"I am sorry to say that there is bad news, and that I am charged to communicate it to you."

"What bad news can you possibly have brought to me?"

He turned as pale as his rubicund countenance would permit, and waited for her statement with an anxiety that he was not able to disguise, for all the set smile with which his face was stamped.

“I regret to say,” continued Miss Christopher, “that your cousin Jane lies dangerously ill in the infirmary of our institution.”

CHAPTER II.

S. G.

THE effect on Mr. Marmadude Spanswick, of Junction Street, Spitalfields, at receiving the intelligence of his cousin's illness, was scarcely that which Miss Christopherson had anticipated. To the watchful gray eyes of his observer, or to her suspicious fancies, being possibly a suspicious woman, it was as though Mr. Spanswick had suddenly brightened up.

When the worst is known, it is often a relief to a nature sensitively organized, and perhaps the tally-man had feared that his cousin was dead.

"Ill, is she? Yes, that's bad news," he replied in a calm tone of voice; "I should say that was bad news, certainly."

“You did not expect worse, Mr. Spanswick?”

“Oh! no,” he said briskly; “it’s bad enough. What’s the matter with Jenny?”

“Smallpox.”

“The devil!” he said, and drew his chair a few feet away from Miss Christopherson, who tried hard to disguise a smile at his sudden exhibition of alarm. “I’m not nervous about such things,” he said, detecting her effort at repression; “I’m not nervous, thank heaven! at anything; not I. Why, that lot there,” pointing to his customers, “are swarming with fevers and smallpoxes, and come here every day from awful unhealthy places; but they don’t give no trouble to me. I never catch nothing, ma’am. I never had a day’s illness in my life. I’m blest with perfect health and strength, and energy.”

Miss Christopherson waited till this self-eulogium was delivered, and then said very quietly,

“The poor girl appears to be uneasy in her mind—to be affected with a strange restless-

ness, which the doctor says stands in the way of her recovery."

"What's she got to be restless about?" he asked; "she's all the comforts that a place like yours can bestow—she's a good home, good people about her, every attention from the nurses and governesses, I'm sure."

He put on his broad smile, and bowed, being more solicitous to impress his visitor by his manner than interested in his cousin's health, Miss Christopherson thought again uncharitably.

"She wishes——"

"One moment, ma'am, if you will permit," he said, rising, leaning across his desk, and dashing his hand against the pane, which he sent outwards on its hinges once more. "Kayley!"

"Yes, sir."

"Here!"

The two claws of the old cashier were seen the instant afterwards hanging to the window-ledge, as though the old man purposed climbing upwards in that direction, and Miss Christo-

pherson knew that Mr. Spanswick was looking down into his yellow dirty face.

“You have got all the money from young Bridge?” he said, in a tone inaudible to the customers; “that troublesome old woman has settled up, then?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How much did you say young Bridge might draw for?”

“I said five pounds; ugh, ugh!” he replied in a feeble croak, as if in enjoyment at a pleasant jest which had just occurred at that moment.

“He shan’t draw five pence,” said the proprietor.

Mr. Spanswick went back to his seat, leaving his trap open, for two reasons—one of which was that, though he was not afraid of smallpox, he did not exactly perceive the advantage of hermetically sealing himself up with a lady who had recently come from a very bad case. He was a man alive to a sense of precaution, far-seeing and shrewd, or he would never have prospered in Spitalfields.

“Now, madam, you were saying——”

“Yes,—one minute in my turn, Mr. Spanswick; but that boy has just paid all his money away on the faith of your clerk’s word.”

“We should not have got his money else,” he said, knowingly, after recovering from his surprise at this diversion; “we have to look sharp at this kind of business—this ignoble kind of business, I daresay you think in your heart, Miss Christopherson—or we should be imposed upon at every turn. They’re awful thieves about here.”

“But he is being served,” said the lady, glancing through the window.

“So he is, by George! Mr. White!” he called out.

“Sir!” said the shopman, who was attending to the requirements of Master Bridge, and who answered without looking up from the task of expatiating on the merits of some flannel before him.

“S. G.”

“Yes, sir.”

Miss Christopherson was an excitable young woman. She was new to Spitalfields life, to tally-shop tactics, to the close fighting between the poor and those on whom the poor depend, and she said sharply,

“What does S. G. mean?”

Mr. Spanswick hesitated, as if reluctant to divulge the secrets of his trade; and then, with his knowing air still more highly developed, he replied, “It means ‘Send goods.’”

“And those goods you do not intend to send?”

“Well, not in this instance,” he said, laughing, until the stern expression which had suddenly come to his visitor’s countenance brought his hilarity to a full stop.

“I beg pardon,” he said, “I am detaining you from the asylum, and forgetting poor Jenny too. So she’s awful bad?”

“She is very ill, as I have informed you,” said Miss Christopherson, coldly; “and she wishes for your father’s address, that she may write to him.”

“Why, what does she want to write to him for?” he asked.

“She is anxious to see her uncle.”

“But what for?”

“It appears natural enough to me. You and he are the only ties she has in the world, poor thing.”

She looked so hard at Mr. Spanswick, that that gentleman, had he not had a better opinion of himself, might have imagined that she was pitying his cousin for having one tie too many.

“Yes; but she don’t ask to see me, does she?”

“No.”

“And don’t that strike you as a little odd, ma’am?” he asked: “as a little ungrateful? for I’ve done a good deal for her, and will put her in the business when she grows up, though I don’t like women behind the counter, with all due deference to a sex for which I have the highest respect.”

He bowed again; then his eyes wandered towards the shop, and to Mr. White, who was serving Master Bridge, or rather taking Master

Bridge's order—and Master Bridge in—and finally came round to his visitor once more.

“Jenny was always fond of my father; they suit each other, he being a bit childish, as perhaps you've heard,” he continued. “I will let him know this as soon as possible.”

“Will you oblige me with his address?” asked Miss Christopherson.

“His address? I—I really do not know it, at the present moment,” he replied slowly.

“Not know it?”

“'Pon my soul, I don't!” he said, with Spital-fields frankness; “he's travelling for my house, and until I get a letter from him—which is generally once a day—there is no saying where one is likely to drop upon the old gentleman. Ours is a business full of branches, what one might call a rummificatory business, in fact.”

“And you trust your father, who you say is a little childish, in a business of this complicated nature?” asked Miss Christopherson.

“Eh?—oh! yes,” he answered; “he is useful sometimes, and one must be filial even at a

discount ; and the mistakes he makes—and he does make no end of them—a son is inclined to put up with. And then I cannot say that he is extremely childish, for he is sharp enough in some things. There goes young Bridge!” he muttered to himself.

Miss Christopherson looked in the same direction ; the shop-door was opening, and the youth, relieved in mind at the accomplishment of his mission, was stepping into Junction Street.

“Poor fellow !” she muttered.

“Ma’am ?” said Mr. Spanswick.

“I was not speaking to you,” she answered, almost sharply, as she rose from her seat. “I am sorry that I have to return with so unsatisfactory a message to your cousin. She is looking forward anxiously, very anxiously, to your father’s visit.”

“He will be in town to-morrow, I daresay ; Sunday is a favourite day of his for travelling, Miss Christopherson.”

“I am sorry to hear it,” was the quick response.

"I object to Sunday travelling myself," said Mr. Spanswick, with alacrity; "but my father has odd ideas of his own on many subjects."

"Good evening."

"Good evening, if you are really going, ma'am," he said, rising, half-presenting his hand, and then drawing it back, as Miss Christopherson appeared not to observe this friendly movement. "I am charmed to have met a young lady of whom my cousin Jenny has spoken frequently in very high terms."

"If she should be any worse I will write to you."

"I thank you."

He held the door open for her, cautioned her to mind the steps, and went down after her into the shop, along which she walked very quickly, as if glad to be gone from the premises.

"That's a nice girl, and no mistake," he remarked, as he went back to his den.

"That's a miserable mean cur," said Maud Christopherson, decisively, as she passed into the busy street without.

CHAPTER III.

MASTER BRIDGE HAS A DOUBT OF MISS CHRISTOPHERSON'S SANITY.

MISS CHRISTOPHERSON, feeling dissatisfied with the result of her mission, and not at all pleased with the general deportment of Marmaduke Spanswick, put up her umbrella and made all the haste that she could out of Junction Street. It was close upon nine o'clock at night, and the streets were fuller and noisier than when she had quitted them; the costermongers were shouting forth the quality and price of the wares upon their barrows; men and women were streaming into the gin-shops; there was a fight in Spitalfields Market, and people were running to see part of the fun before the police put a stop to it; a child with bare feet

was standing in the muddy road, singing doggerel verses; and a woman, who should have been a child, so young was she, was making a drunken speech, with her baby in her arms, to a ribald few who had stopped to listen to her maunderings.

Half-way towards the broader thoroughfare of Bishopsgate Street she met with Master Bridge again. It may be said that Master Bridge had contrived to overtake her, for he came behind her and touched her on the shoulder.

“I thought that I had lost you, Miss Christopherson,” he said, blushing and stammering at her surprise.

“How do you know my name?” she asked.

“You told it to Mr. Spanswick when I was in the shop. Don’t you remember?”

“Ah! I recollect now. What do you want with me, my poor boy?”

It was a kind inquiry, but he did not appear to relish her style of address. He looked in a somewhat dignified manner at her for a moment before he laughed again.

“Well—I wanted to—to tell you,” he said, beginning suddenly to stammer, “not to go to that place if you want any goods, or any credit, or any kindness. It’s not a place I liked to see you in, and you would be treated better anywhere else; it’s only people up a tree—I daresay you don’t know what ‘up a tree’ means now?—who go to such a shop as Spanswick’s.”

“Your interest in a stranger is very remarkable,” said Miss Christopherson, more coldly; for this was, after all, a big boy; and—Heaven have mercy upon us and upon them!—how precocious big boys are nowadays!

He was dashed down immediately by the change in her voice; he fell into his rightful position, and the good-looking face, which had beamed with smiles a moment since, became suddenly grave.

“You are not exactly a stranger,” he replied. “I did not know your name before this evening, but I knew you.”

“Indeed!”

“I will walk with you till you find an omni-

bus, and we are in a more respectable thoroughfare, where you are safer and I more shabby," the boy said, with a frankness which pleased his listener, "because I wish to persuade you not to go to Spanswick's. I cannot understand how you heard of him at Camberwell."

"You know that I live at Camberwell, then?"

"Why, you told him that too," he said, "although I knew it before; for you and the children and the rest of the governesses used to come to church every Sunday at St. Cuthbert's—twelve months ago, that was: and when I want a good walk, I often go over to St. Cuthbert's still on Sunday mornings, to see the old place and—the old faces."

"You go regularly to church, then?"

"Yes. The old lady would break her heart if I did not go to church regularly."

"Your mother?"

"Oh! no, my grandmother, who keeps house for me," said he; "my mother and father are country people, you know—that is, you do know now. I am in London to make my for-

tune, and they are waiting very anxiously for it down at Brayling in Dorsetshire. So am I—waiting for it in town,” he added drily.

“Brayling!” she ejaculated—“Brayling in Dorsetshire!”

Miss Christopherson, had she not met with a new surprise, would have been amused by the boy’s confidence, by a certain amount of self-possession which was rare in a youth of his age and station, and which showed itself despite occasional touches of embarrassment. He was a singular boy, and she had always been interested in singular people. Mediocrity in everything Miss Christopherson had invariably despised.

“And you advise me not to go to the Spital-fields Emporium any more?”

“I advise you not to go—to be sure I do.”

“Well, I will not.”

“Thank you,” he said, as though she had conferred a favour upon him; and as she smiled at this, he burst forth with considerable impetuosity—

“Oh! you are laughing at me; well, it is ridiculous for a fellow like me to advise a lady like you; but I—I thought”—and here he betrayed his nervousness at approaching a delicate subject—“that you might be a little hard up. People are often hard up, even in Camberwell.”

“I do not know that I am particularly hard up at present,” she said, repeating his phrase as if she perfectly understood its signification; “in fact, some people tell me that I am pretty well off—for a governess.”

“I am glad to hear that—though it’s no business of mine,” he added.

“And some people tell me that I am a very odd woman—too eccentric to live long, or, at all events, to keep long in my right mind,” she added, with a scornfulness which the boy did not attempt to understand, and only marvelled at. “My mother would tell you this, for one, without a moment’s hesitation. Now, Master Bridge, look me in the face, and tell me if you would think me very mad if I were to ask you

to borrow of me two pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence."

Master Bridge's lower jaw dropped for a moment, and he took a deep breath.

"Why do you not answer?" she inquired, after a long pause for his reply.

"Well, Miss Christopherson, I should think you a little mad, perhaps," he said, thus adjured.

"If I wanted to get rid of my money—if I hated money, even?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because you know nothing of me—because I may be a terrible scamp, for anything you can tell to the contrary."

"You may; but I do not think you are. And whether you be a scamp or not, I should like to lend you this amount."

She stopped at the corner of a street leading to Bishopsgate Street, and looked the boy in the face, who returned her gaze steadfastly, and thought what a sharp, almost cross coun-

tenance had suddenly confronted his. She was excited, too, for the gloved hand which held the umbrella shook a little with her agitation.

“Poor Miss Christopherson,” thought Master Bridge, “to think that she should be a little mad after all!”

“No, I’d rather not have your money, thank you,” he said very hurriedly; “and I will say good night now, with your permission.”

“Stay a moment,” she cried. “You don’t know that Mr. Spanswick of the Emporium has taken your money, and has no intention of opening a fresh account with you, or of sending the goods home which you have ordered.”

“Who—Spanswick? Oh, he would never think of such a trick as that; he would not be such a downright scamp. I don’t believe that that’s like Spanswick.”

“He says it is business.”

“But do you mean to say that he—that he—will not send home the goods? If I thought—”

And the boy clenched his fists, and stamped both feet upon the pavement.

"It is a just debt. He is a man of no fine feelings, and doubtless thinks that he is justified in getting his money in any way that presents itself; most men do."

"I promised the old lady—and she gets sharp and querulous when put off—and—oh, Spanswick and his ugly cashier would not have lied like that. You must have fancied this."

"Will you borrow two pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence of me, Master Bridge?"

"Ah! you remember the amount I paid that yellow scarecrow, I see," he said; "and perhaps I understand, or half understand, what is in your thoughts concerning me. But I would rather not take your money."

"What is your grandmother to do?"

"Struggle on, as she has struggled on before with me. If it's all as you say, I may try and choke Spanswick by flying at his bull-throat, or I may fling a stone through his window, and so lose my new berth and find another at government expense—I——"

"Will you take this money? If you can re-

pay Spanswick, you can repay me, I suppose."

"No," he said doggedly. "I—I can't borrow from a strange lady in the streets, or one to whom I am strange, at least. I don't think you mad now. I know you to be as kind and good as I have always thought you when you have been sitting amongst those orphan girls, who love you so much——"

"No, they do not," she said, interrupting him.

"I'll be as grateful as if I had the money, and the old lady her blankets and flannels; but do not ask me any more, please. Why, you do not know what a proud fellow I am, or my grandmother is, or the good souls in the country are. We are all awfully stuck-up; and this will not do, Miss Christopherson."

"You silly, thick-headed boy," she said sharply, "you don't know why I want to help you. Your people are no strangers to me. I come from Brayling in Dorsetshire; I have lived there nearly all my life. Your father and mother I have known from the day they came to Brayling; and they were never too proud to accept

a kindness that was not flung at them like a bone. They called me Miss Lawson at Brayling, before I went away."

"You—you Miss Lawson!" cried the boy, aghast; "the lady of whom my people have written so often, whom they missed so much—the rich lady! Oh! you don't know how odd this is to me—how——"

And then he paused, and looked at her with tears in his eyes.

"Will you take that money, which I lend to Matthew Bridge's boy to help him in a strait," she asked, "to please a friend of your mother's?"

The boy hung down his head, and answered in a more submissive tone:

"If you can trust me, Miss Lawson, I will take it."

"I am not Miss Lawson; I shall never be so again. It was never my right name," she said, with some degree of warmth, as she opened her purse, took three sovereigns therefrom, and handed them to the boy. "Have you a six-

pence, Master Bridge?" she asked very quietly, the instant afterwards.

"Yes, Miss Christopherson," he answered.

He gave her the sixpence in return for the gold, murmured his thanks, and regarded her very wistfully. He had large gray eyes, not unlike her own; and the look in them was pitiful, respectful, and wondering.

"And to think that you—that you," he said, "are at the orphan-school as teacher, and that I have always believed you to be a poor girl—or almost poor. Do they know——"

"Not anything," she answered. "Good night."

"Good night."

He took off his cap by way of salutation to her, but he forgot to put it on again, and he stood looking after her bareheaded, with the small rain descending on him slowly, until she was merged in the stream of human life. Then he pulled his cap over his brows, thrust his hands into his pockets, and turned back in the direction of Junction Street.

"This will be something to astonish the old lady with, at any rate," he said, as he marched onwards for a few minutes. Suddenly he came to a full stop, paused for an instant, and then dashed madly back along the middle of the road, in the direction which Miss Christopherson had taken. She had walked very sharply, or an omnibus had overtaken her, or she had hired a cab, he thought, when he came up with her again, and startled her by gasping forth her name.

"I beg your pardon. I'm a terrible nuisance, I'm afraid; but you never told me what you came to Mr. Spanswick's for."

"Is it any business of yours?" she asked, a little put out of temper at his reappearance.

"No; but it has struck me that I may be of assistance to you, as I should like to be. Is anything wrong at the school with little Spanswick?"

"That's a shrewd guess," she said.

"I have heard the old man—that is, Spanswick's father, Miss Christopherson—talk of his

little niece a great deal. It is a way of his to bother people like that; but it did not strike me that she was at your orphan-school till this minute."

"You know Uncle Spanswick, then?"

"Yes; a little."

"I thought that you did not go to Spanswick's place; that this was your first visit, on your own account, to that shop in Junction Street."

"So it is. But Uncle Spanswick does not live in Junction Street."

"Where does he live?"

"I do not know exactly. I think that I could find out."

"He is travelling for his son, Bridge."

"Travelling for his son! He does not travel much, I think. He's always about here."

Miss Christopherson looked surprised.

"Find him for me, if you can. Tell him that I think his niece is dying, and that, if he wants to see her, he must come at once."

"I will find him," he said.

He went away in search of him immediately

—even before he returned home to his grandmother to astound her with his news. He went to various strange places in Whitechapel, Spitalfields, and Shoreditch, taking a great many dingy coffee-houses *en route*, and asking many questions of their landlords; looking in at small barbers' shops, where easy shaving was to be had for a halfpenny, and where Spanswick senior was probably shaven easily for that specified amount; but finding him not at his haunts, and meeting with no one who could afford him any information as to the precise locality of Mr. Spanswick's lodgings. He had nearly given up his search for that night, and was thinking of his grandmother, when he found himself once more in Junction Street. The clock in the steeple of Spitalfields Church was striking eleven.

“By Jove! what will the old lady say, if she has not gone to bed offended with me?” he said.

He stood and looked across the way at Marmaduke Spanswick's Emporium, where business

was less brisk at that hour, but where the proprietor was still doing pretty well. As he paused, the man who had waited upon him behind the counter issued forth, hatless and with a pen behind his ear, and a letter in his hand, which he flapped to and fro carelessly as he paused for a moment to hold parley with the butcher's young man next door.

"Where are you off to, Jack?" the butcher remarked as Master Bridge crossed the road.

"Oh! to old Spanswick's," Jack said surlily; "as if a feller had not enough slavery of it in there. As if—Well, what do you want?"

Master Bridge had touched his arm at this moment.

"I say, have those things gone home?"

"Oh! yes; you'll find them all at home, I daresay—if you wait long enough," he added, as young Bridge thanked him very respectfully and walked away. The shopman lingered for a few moments to tell the story of the governor's sharp practice with the Bridges; and there were several hearty roars of laughter between

the butcher and the draper's man, until they were suddenly cut short by the appearance of Mr. Spanswick at his shop-door, and by Mr. Spanswick bursting into a volley of oaths at finding his assistant's "cussed hulking carcass," as he termed it, still within a few paces of the business.

The young man muttered hasty excuses, and fled for his life along Junction Street, and Master Geoffrey Bridge followed in his wake.

CHAPTER IV.

UNCLE SPANSWICK.

MR. WHITE, the junior assistant at the Spitalfields Emporium, slackened his pace, and "took it easy," as he termed it, when fully assured that several streets lay between him and his master. In common with the two young men and the dirty old one who held office under Mr. Spanswick, Mr. White was afraid of his principal. Spanswick was not so bad at times. If he had his little tempers, he had his little jokes; but it was as well known on the premises as beyond them, in the tortuous streets whose denizens dealt at Spanswick's, that he stood no nonsense. In the memory of his oldest servant, Mr. Kayley, and of the oldest inhabitant

in Spitalfields, he had never been known to stand any nonsense. When he told his young man that he was to go next Saturday night, the young man went, for it was understood that the master had made up his mind, and was not likely to change it; when he locked up another young man for confiscating several rolls of scarlet satin ribbon—a favourite colour, on which there was always a run in the spring-van season—nobody begged for mercy, not even the mother, who lived hard by, for it was thoroughly understood that the purloiner was to go to trial; when he brought his big hand upon the counter, and informed a trembling woman who had fallen into arrears of payment that, if the money was not forthcoming by to-morrow afternoon, he should sew her up, the woman was sewn up by legal process accordingly, which commenced punctually at the hour mentioned. This was the only way, he asserted, to do business in Junction Street; and to do business with any prospect of great profits to himself, probably it was. Out of business—

very often in it—he was full of his fun ; to his best customers he was a charming man across the counter, or when he met them in the neighbourhood ; and in a favourite bar-parlour round the corner after nine o'clock on Monday nights he was more than convivial, for he promoted conviviality in others, and was president of the George Street Harmonic Meetings, and always led off with “Heigh-ho, tantivy !” which he sung very well indeed. He was not a bad neighbour, and his fellow-tradesmen in the vicinity sought his acquaintance, went to dog-fights and cricket-matches with him, when he could afford the time, laughed at his jokes, and were pleased if he took their daughters to the Standard or East London, where the ladies said he was always such a gentleman.

People who had no business relations with Mr. Spanswick liked him best, and saw his brightest side. Mr. White did not like him at all, and he had been nearly twelve months in his service without seeing any brightness in him.

“If I could poison ’im with strike-nine, I’d do

it," Mr. White had been heard to declare to a confidential friend; but the opportunity had not presented itself, or Mr. White had not thought it worth his while.

And yet Mr. White thought a great deal of his wrongs. He was brooding on the last indignity which had been launched at him, as he went along bare-headed, after the fashion of East-end shopmen out on business, or he might have observed that Master Bridge was close on his heels, and have considered it a curious coincidence. He went down various streets of a squalid character at a leisurely pace, nodding in a patronising manner at those customers whom he met proceeding to their homes, and stopping once at a tobacconist's shop, which, after long study of the contents of its window, he entered, and bought three cigars for fourpence-halfpenny, intending to show off a bit to-morrow, if it were at all fine, in the Victoria Park.

Master Bridge thought the shopman would never get on; but the journey's end was ac-

complished at last, in a narrow court that ran at right angles to Star-court, where his grandmother kept house for him.

“Who would have thought of old Spanswick being so close to us?” said Geoffry Bridge, as he dived into the darkness after Mr. White. Here another idea seized him. “Who would have thought of Spanswick sending round to the old man to tell him of his niece’s illness?” was his second remark.

Mr. White knocked at the last house in the court, and Master Bridge slackened his pace. The door was opened before he reached the man whose footsteps he had been tracking, and he heard the inquiry put as to whether Mr. Spanswick was in.

“He’s not in yet,” croaked a woman’s voice.

“Then I’ll go up to his room, and wait for him.”

“I don’t know when he’s coming home; he keeps orful hours.”

“Top back, I s’pose, as before?” said Mr.

White, without any attention to this remark.

"If it's a letter," said the woman, "you can leave it, without going up a-muddying my stairs. I've got company to-morrer—my gal's going to be married."

"It's more than my place is worth not to give it him himself—though that's not worth much," he added surlily.

"Jest wipe your feet then," said the landlady.

Mr. White was admitted, the door was closed, and Geoffrey Bridge was left without in the night drizzle to deliberate upon his next step.

"Out!" said Geoffrey; "then I'll run round to the old lady and see if the blankets have come, before I call on Uncle Spanswick, and make sure that it's all right."

Meanwhile Mr. White had ascended the stairs without wiping his feet, to show his contempt for injunctions which no law of his country compelled him to follow; and the old woman lost her temper, and screamed after him that he was a rip, and that she'd remember him;

not knowing, poor woman, what a luxury it was for the young man to disobey instructions.

Mr. White went upstairs with a deal of unnecessary noise and superfluous whistling ; kicked open the door of the top-floor room, to save himself the trouble of taking his right hand out of his pocket ; marched in, and found, to his amazement, that the gentleman of whom he was in search was lying on the floor, under a small heap of tattered bedclothes, reading his penny weekly newspaper by the aid of a rushlight, which was on a chair in dangerous proximity to himself and the sheets.

“Well, White,” he said, looking over the edge of his newspaper, as the visitor entered, “what on earth have you been making all this row about?”

“Hallo!” cried Mr. White ; “what ! you *are* in, then?”

“Yes ; and in bed. What’s the matter?”

“Why, that lying woman in the parlour told me you were out.”

“Very likely,” was the response, “for the lie

was an advantage; and I daresay she wanted to save her stairs, as there are rare doings to-morrow—a marriage in the family below. Ever been married, White?”

“I can’t say as I have,” said White, with a short laugh, “or that I mean to.”

“Quite right. Will you sit down?”

Mr. White looked round, but saw nothing to sit upon. The furniture consisted of one chair, on which was the senior Mr. Spanswick’s rushlight; there was neither table nor drawers in the room; it was a room of ghastly bareness.

“Here’s a seat,” said Mr. Spanswick, coolly taking the battered tin candlestick in which the rushlight was fixed, and placing it on the bolster beside him, where it tilted forwards ominously; “will this do?”

“Thank’ee, yes, for I’m fit to drop; I’ve been at it ever since seven this morning; druv hard. You know what he is?”

“Yes, I know what he is,” was the stern response.

“Although he is a son of yours, you don’t care about a feller speaking out?”

"No, I don't care."

"He wouldn't leave you in this plight—his own father—if he was a man. I've said so afore, Mister Spanswick."

"Then I wouldn't say it again."

"Why not?"

"Once is enough. It's no good worrying at a grievance. I take things philosophically, don't I?"

"I don't know how you take them," said Mr. White, with a sudden sullenness.

"Well, what is the news? Is that letter for me?"

"Yes, it is."

"Are you to wait for an answer?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then I'll finish this article first; one thing at a time, White."

"Jest as you like. I'm in no hurry to get back before the shop shuts. I shall say you were out, and that I had to wait."

"Yes, I would," said Mr. Spanswick coolly, as he held the newspaper close to his eyes, after

the manner of a man very short-sighted, and commenced reading diligently. Mr. White leaned back in the chair and enjoyed perfect ease. He drew his cigars from his pocket, unrolled the paper in which they were wrapped, and attentively examined them and smelt them; and when satisfied, from the result of his careful scrutiny, that they were of the right sort, he took stock of the recumbent figure before him.

Uncle Spanswick was an odd-looking man, evidently a tall man by the length of limb which was stretched beneath his bedclothes, or a variety of articles that served for bedclothes. That he was an attenuated man it was easy to judge from his sharp pinched features, and the thin hands—all bones and ropy veins—which clutched at the newspaper. A wild-looking man also, despite that coolness with which he had received Mr. White's unlooked-for advent, with a tangled mane of light-brown hair, going on for gray, and long brownish-gray whiskers, which lay upon the torn coverlet of his bed, and gave him an unkempt shaggy look. A man very much

lined, and with a restless pair of eyes, which rolled from corner to corner as he read his newspaper in a manner that rendered his observer slightly nervous, for Mr. White had not the heart of a lion.

"Anything hup, Mr. Spanswick?" he asked at last.

"Up where?"

"Anything new in the papers that's *very* interesting?"

"Nothing new."

"I thought there was."

"Why?" was the inquiry.

"I don't know; you look as if there was."

"There's a murder, White; I'm fond of murders." And he glared over his paper so fixedly at his companion, that Mr. White perspired a little, and said that it was quite time he was off.

"Pass the letter," said Mr. Spanswick. "As if you could not allow a man to finish his article in peace—you know how pressed I am, and what little time I get."

He crumpled up his paper, and put it behind his head, where Mr. White expected to see it catch fire every instant ; took the letter from the hands of his son's assistant, opened the envelope, drew forth the note inside, and sent several shillings flying about the room. Mr. Spanswick's cool deportment wholly left him at this; he sprang up in bed, leaned forwards on his hands, and yelled forth, with a shrill vehemence that curdled every drop of blood in Mr. White's body :

“Look at the money, you gaping idiot ! Why didn't you tell me that my son had sent me money ?”

“I forgot—I—mind the light, there—it's going, mister, and we shall all be burnt to hashcs.”

Mr. Spanswick stopped his candlestick with a quick hand, and placed it on the chair from which Mr. White had sprung galvanically. The instant afterwards he was out of bed, crawling over the floor for the money that had been sent him, and keeping one eye on Mr. White, who was assisting him to pick it up.

“He says four shillings for fare there and back, and ten shillings for my weeks’ keep; that’s fourteen shillings,” he remarked when he had crawled into bed again; “let me see if it’s all right.”

“Here’s six shillings.”

“Then you have got a shilling,” said Mr. Spanswick. “Oh, no, here it is; I have it. Now, what does Marmaduke want me to do for this? It is not likely that it has been sent for nothing; though he’s not so bad—not so very bad,” he muttered.

He read the letter attentively, holding it close to his eyes, as he had held the newspaper a moment since, and glaring at it in much the same fierce fashion.

“Oh! that’s all,” he said, when he had read the missive.

“Private and confidential?” said Mr. White interrogatively.

“No. The Browns have run away with seven pounds’ worth of furniture, and I am to be at Guildford in the morning by the first train,

and see if the man and his wife are in Castle Street, No. 204, and, if the information's wrong, to wait at the 'Feathers' beer-shop till he writes to me on Monday, and tells me what to do. Well, it's nothing new. Good night."

"What shall I tell the governor?"

"That his orders shall be attended to."

He took up his paper again, and Mr. White said curiously,

"Do you generally read yourself off to sleep like that?"

"When I can sleep," was the answer.

Mr. White bade him good night, and closed the door behind him; and Mr. Spanswick senior put the paper on his chest, crossed his lank hands upon the paper, and listened to his late visitor's heavy feet as they descended the stairs, slipping suddenly at the last flight, and bringing Mr. White heavily, and of a heap, to the bottom, along with a copper stick, which, to his dying day, Mr. White firmly believed that the landlady had set upon the stairs expressly for him.

"Ah, he has not broken his neck," said the

senior Mr. Spanswick calmly, when the door was slammed to afterwards ; then he lay and thought very attentively, blinking a little at the rushlight, and holding communion with it in a dreamy manner.

“Marmaduke is in a hurry,” he said ; “Marmaduke never liked to lose money.”

Suddenly he got out of bed, and commenced dressing himself.

“I’ll walk it, and save the fare,” he muttered ; “I can get down to-morrow early if I start at once. I’m a good walker ; it’s not far for me.”

When he was dressed, in a shabby suit of black, which he brushed with his hands, and put on with the greatest caution, he folded his newspaper, placed it in his breast-pocket, made sure again that the money which had been sent him was correct, put on a very rusty hat, which in its day had been the property of some one who had had a larger head—it was a gift of Marmaduke’s, in fact—and which came over his ears and eyebrows very easily.

He extinguished his rushlight, and went

out of the room and downstairs, a tall man with a stoop. On the mat on which Mr. White had not wiped his feet, he found his landlady awaiting him.

“What are *you* about the stairs for, Mr. Spanswick?” she said tartly; “it’s jest as if everybody was a-doing it on puppus.”

“I am going out, Mrs. Wilcox.”

“Then I locks you out, for I ain’t a-going to leave the latch on to-night for nobody.”

“I shall not be back for a week at least.”

“Oh, very well.”

“Tell Kitty that I wish her good luck with her marriage, and that I am sorry I cannot look in to-morrow afternoon to wish her joy for myself.”

“‘Thank’ee, thank’ee, Mister Spanswick,” said the woman, much mollified by her top-floor-back’s good wishes; and then she shut him out in the court, and heard him feeling his way for a while with his stick, as if the darkness without was very dense that night.

Mrs. Wilcox had been in her front room more

than a quarter of an hour after this, helping her daughter Kitty with her wedding-dress—a blue merino, and bought at the Emporium—when a heavy knocking sounded at the street-door again.

“If the old wretch hasn’t come back, after all! I knew he would.”

But the old wretch had not come back; and it was a tall, rosy-faced, curly-haired youth, who would have stepped with *his* boots into the passage, had it not been that Mrs. Wilcox was on the alert, and put the door ajar with promptitude, nearly shutting Master Bridge’s foot in also.

“Wot is it now?”

“Old Mr. Spanswick—has he come home, please?”

“He has been home, and he has just gone out again.”

“Gone out—where?”

“I don’t know.”

“When will he be back?”

“He says that he won’t be back for a week.”

“How long has he been gone?”

“Not a minit—you might catch him if you run a bit.”

Geoffry Bridge turned at once, and ran for his life down the court, turning to the left at the top, as he had come from the right without encountering him of whom he was in search; and the mendacious Mrs. Wilcox locked up for the night.

CHAPTER V.

“DETACHED.”

MISS CHRISTOPHERSON reached the iron gates of the City Clerks' Orphan Asylum shortly after ten o'clock. The City Clerks' Orphan Asylum was an institution that did everything by rule, and the man at the gate entered the time of Miss Christopherson's return as though it was a minute of some consequence. A matron of the place met her under an arcade of the quadrangle, and after making a circuit round her for precaution's sake, said,

“How late you are !”

“Yes, it is late.”

“Mrs. Thurtle is so cross.”

“I am sorry to hear it,” was the answer.

Crossing the square plot of ground towards the infirmary quarters, Miss Christopherson encountered the mistress of the establishment, a tall portly woman, of the "commanding" genus, who made also a circuit round her, something wider than that of the last lady whom she had met, and came to a full stop at a respectful distance.

"Miss Christopherson, this is really too bad," said Mrs. Thurtle, in a tone of grave reproof.

"I am late, madam ; but I was detained at Mr. Spanswick's."

"You know the child will only let you attend her, and that it would not be safe for the school to send another young woman into an infected room. You are aware, Miss Christopherson, that you have been 'detached' for the purpose of devoting your sole attention to Jane Spanswick."

"I am devoting my sole attention to her, madam ; I hope that she has not been fretting since my absence."

"She has been very irritable, I hear ; she is a

most irritable child, and the nurse she has actually insulted."

"I am sorry to hear that."

"May I ask what is the result of your visit to the draper's? Have you found her uncle?"

"He is not at home; his son has no immediate means of communicating with him, he says."

"He says?" said Mrs. Thurtle, quickly; "do you not believe him?"

"I have no reason for disbelieving him," replied Miss Christopherson.

"It is very annoying," said Mrs. Thurtle; "the doctor says the child's mind is quite unsettled by her odd fancy."

"It is unsettled," said Miss Christopherson; "and it is not an odd fancy, if you will excuse my poor opinion."

Miss Christopherson spoke humbly, as a subordinate should do to a superior in office; but the mistress of the City Clerks' Orphan Asylum objected to her opinion nevertheless.

"Why is it not an odd fancy, may I ask, as

you have been pleased to see this distressing case in a different light from me?" asked Mrs. Thurtle, almost sharply.

"The uncle is the only one whom she appears to love in the world, or who she thinks loves her; and it is natural to wish to see him at the last."

"Strange people upset the establishment by getting into wrong places," said the mistress wearily; "and sooner or later we all must die."

"But not die alone, looking at a bare wall and a hired nurse," replied Miss Christopherson thoughtfully.

"Our dear charges are not likely, poor lambs, to have many friends," said Mrs. Thurtle, proceeding on her way, with a grave shake of her head. "Good evening, Miss Christopherson. You will let me know if she gets worse; and you will please keep to her room as much as you can, for the sake of our little orphans. Ah!" with a heavy sigh, "this has been a trying time for us all!"

Miss Christopherson bowed, and continued

her progress. She entered that portion of the building allotted to an infirmary, the servants making every possible way for her, and walked towards the door of a room lying apart, as it were, from the others, at the end of a long corridor. This was the room set aside for any patient or patients suffering from a contagious disorder; and here Jane Spanswick, the “detached” one, was struggling for her life.

Miss Christopherson knocked softly, and a stout, motherly-looking soul, in an old-fashioned frill cap, opened the door the instant afterwards.

“There, here she is, Jenny. Did I not say she’d come before the hour struck?”

“Yes; but you have said it after every hour, you know,” said a feeble little voice.—“Come in, Miss Christopherson. Oh! what a time you have been away!”

“Not asleep, then, Jenny?” said the governess, entering the room, and looking towards a little bed, on which a girl of an uncertain age—she might have been ten, judging by her fra-

gility, and twenty, by her pale, thoughtful-looking face—was lying.

“Asleep?—no,” she answered; “I have not been trying to sleep.”

“That was wrong of you,” said Miss Christopherson, taking off her bonnet and cloak, and sitting by the bedside. The little girl put forth her wasted hand, and the young woman took it within her own, and gazed down upon her earnestly. There were no marks of the ravages of a terrible disease upon Jenny Spanswick. The disorder she had passed through bravely, and it was a relapse which had struck her down. On the white, pinched face, there was no disfigurement. Ten days back she had congratulated herself on not having been made plainer than she was before her illness; and though Jenny Spanswick had never been exactly a plain girl, still no one would have set her down for a pretty one at this stage of her career. In her bed that warm winter’s night she looked very old-fashioned, and yet she was only fourteen years of age, after all.

“What did uncle say, Miss Christopherson?” asked the child at last; “was he not very much frightened?”

“I am going to tell you all from the commencement,” said the governess cautiously, “and you must let me tell the story my own way.”

“I won’t interrupt you,” she said; and a pair of dark eyes looked very hard at her as she spoke. “I won’t say another word until you have finished.”

“Miss Christopherson has not had her supper yet, Jenny,” said the nurse, by way of a suggestion.

“She can have her supper and talk too—she always does,” said Jenny.

“To be sure I can—and will.”

“And when Mrs. Gray has done rattling the plates about, I shall be glad of your beginning,” said the child, impatiently.

Miss Christopherson’s supper, a very plain one of bread and cheese, was now before her, and she was sitting at the table, close to the sick child. The nurse withdrew, and Miss Christo-

pherson commenced her story. It was a painful recital, for the sequel was disheartening; but she acquitted herself with considerable skill, albeit the effect upon her listener was as she had anticipated. She spoke of her visit to Spital-fields, of her discovery of the Emporium, and her interview with its proprietor, dwelling very decisively on Mr. Marmaduke Spanswick's promise to communicate with his father at the earliest opportunity, and his opinion that he should see his father within a few hours from that time.

"So, Jenny, with only those few hours to wait," said Miss Christopherson, cheerfully, "and those hours to be spent in sleep, let us hope, till the time comes, we may consider the mission a satisfactory one."

"Do you think so, Miss Maud?" asked the child.

Jenny Spanswick had addressed the governess lately as Miss Maud. She had not begged the favour of that familiarity, but the governess had guessed her wish, strangely enough, and

had asked if she would call her by her Christian name. The governess was certainly odd; she did not like the idea of the child going out of the world calling her Miss Christopherson.

She looked away a little.

“Yes, in its way. Not so satisfactory, Jenny, as if I had found your uncle; but the next thing to it.”

“It’s a long way off it to me,” she said, fretfully. “I can’t see him coming along the road. Marmaduke will never tell him.”

“Why should he not?” asked Miss Christopherson, bending over her eagerly.

“Ah! why should he?” was the enigmatical rejoinder.

“He knows that you are fond of your uncle, and that you are ill——”

“Did you tell him very ill?” said the child, quickly here.

“Yes, very ill, dear,” replied Miss Christopherson.

“And that the doctor says——”

“There, never mind what the doctor has

said," cried Miss Christopherson, interrupting her in her turn. "I do not believe everything that the doctors say; I never did, I never shall, Jenny. There can be no reason for your cousin keeping this illness a secret from your uncle, surely?"

"N—no," said Jenny.

"You do not know of any reason?"

"I do not *know* of any," said the girl, with a slight emphasis.

"But guess at one, and perhaps a foolish one," said Miss Christopherson; "harassing yourself into a fever, which keeps you back, when peace of mind is the best chance for your health."

"Yes, you have said that before," said the girl, wearily. "Oh! if he would only come—if someone would only tell him!" she cried, with a sudden fervour which would have alarmed one less used to these impulsive fits than Miss Christopherson was by this time. "If I had not been so foolish as to keep my illness from him, lest it should frighten him to death—and now my

dying without wishing him good-bye! Oh! it will kill him, it will kill him!"

She buried her face in her pillow, and sobbed violently. She tossed to and fro with restless force, until the hand of the governess—who had stood by her, and wished to stand by her, when nervous officials had made every excuse to keep away—rested on her mass of raven hair.

"Courage, Jenny! What did you promise me, even at the worst?" asked Miss Christopherson, in the gentlest of tones.

"I am not grieving for myself," said the girl, becoming suddenly grave and passive. "I don't think I shall be afraid to die—though I shan't like it *very* much! You don't see—sometimes I think you won't see—that I am grieving about him."

"I do see that, Jenny," said Miss Christopherson.

"I want to say something to him which I ought to have said long ago—which I have been trying to say, but did not like, and could not find courage for, because I was a coward."

“What was it?”

“It’s—it’s a little secret, perhaps a fancy only; I can’t very well tell you,” she said slowly; “haven’t you your little secret or fancy about something, and tell nobody?”

Miss Christopherson looked down.

“Perhaps I have, Jenny,” she repeated. “You are a sharp child for your age.”

“My cousin Marmaduke is sharp, and so is Uncle William, they say,” repeated the child; “but I’m not sharp enough. Mrs. Thurtle—I don’t like Mrs. Thurtle,” she added in a whisper—“says that I’m a silly thing.”

“Will you try and sleep, Jenny?”

“I’ll try, if you like.”

“Do, dear.”

“You’re going to sit up again?”

“A little while.”

“All night—because it’s ordered?”

“Jenny, if you do not shut your eyes, I shall be very cross with you,” said Miss Christopherson, gently enough.

“I am going to try to sleep. But if he

comes—if he rings that big bell at the gates, however late, you will see that the porter lets him in. I am sure that you will do that.”

“I have the pass-keys to-night. The porter has gone to bed. I will let him in myself.”

“How kind you are! If I were only half as good, I should be sure of heaven.”

“Jenny!” cried Miss Christopherson, warmly, “I’m bad, and sullen, and spiteful, and malicious, and hated by everybody—by everybody in all the world, my dear! Don’t say another word, don’t vex me, don’t disturb me.”

Jenny succumbed to this vehemence, and closed her eyes. But she lay thinking of it for long afterwards. There was no sleep for her, no chance of sleep; but she did not say as much again, and she only opened her quivering eyelids sufficiently wide to watch the figure of her favourite nurse, who had stolen to the low-burning fire, and was brooding over it, with one fair white hand holding her chin, and her elbow resting on her lap. She thought there for a long period; the great clock of the establish-

ment—a noisy, sonorous clock, which had been presented by the first patron, and which Jenny Spanswick wished had been buried with him—struck twelve, and one, without the graceful figure by the fire changing its position. Suddenly the coals in the grate fell together with a harsh noise, and Maud Christopherson glanced towards the bed.

“Asleep, Jenny?”

“No, Miss Maud.”

“Try, child, try. Count fifty thousand; I have heard that that is a good plan.”

Jenny did not count fifty thousand, and did not fall asleep; but Miss Christopherson herself began to doze instead of her. She was tired with her journey; the silence in the room had its quiescent effect, and all was very still without.

Suddenly Jenny raised her head to listen. Someone, a long way off on the footpath leading to the institution, was advancing at a sharp pace. It was like his step; so very like his step to her excited fancy, that she cried out sharply,

“Miss Maud, I hear him; I—I think I hear him coming!”

Miss Christopherson was awake directly, and looking anxiously towards her.

“Fancy, Jenny. Do try and——”

She started to her feet. The bell at the great iron gates clanged loudly, and as it seemed to her incessantly, and she was moving to the door the instant afterwards.

“It is he!” cried Jenny. “Oh! make haste!”

“It may be a runaway ring,” said the governess. “Do not excite yourself unnecessarily; do not be disappointed if this is someone else.”

She went swiftly from the room along the corridor, down the stone steps, through the door into the cool quadrangle, where the fine rain was falling still, across to the oaken gates, which she unlocked, and beyond them to the great iron gates, whereat a tall, high-shouldered man was standing, clutching at the railings, and peering through them eagerly.

“What is your business?” asked Miss Christopherson.

“My name is Spanswick. There is a little child here—my niece—who is very ill, I—I am told.”

“Come in,” said the governess, unlocking the gate; “I am glad that you are here.”

She admitted the tall man, who raised a large and shabby hat to her; she locked the gate, opened the oaken doors, which she also locked behind her, crossed the quadrangle, passed with him through the infirmary door, locking that also, went up the stone steps, along the corridor, and into the sick-room, with the tall shabby man, who had asked no questions by the way.

Jenny held her arms towards him as he entered, and shrieked out:

“I knew you would come!—oh! I knew that you would not stop away when I was ill!”

The man gave one heavy sob at the sight of her, went across the room with quick steps, knelt down, and put his arms around her as she lay there. “Oh! Jenny, dear,” he faltered forth, “how’s this?”

CHAPTER VI.

THE LATE VISITOR.

THERE was a silence of several minutes' duration after the tall shabby man had sunk down at the bedside of the sick child. Jenny Spanswick lay with two wasted hands on the shoulders of him who had come in search of her, and the man gazed eagerly into her face, as if he would learn from it all the truth.

Suddenly he looked away from her towards the slight figure of Miss Christopherson standing by the door.

"How long has this been?" he said huskily.

"Some weeks," replied the governess.

"And no one to let me know how ill she was!" he said, reproachfully.

“It was your niece’s wish.”

“I was afraid that you would fret about it. I have not been very ill—seriously ill, as they say—until a few days back,” explained the child; “and then I thought that I should like to see you very much.”

The man looked hard into her face, as if puzzled yet by what he read there, and then glanced again towards the figure by the door.

“May I speak to you for one moment?” he inquired.

Miss Christopherson assented.

He rose and left the room with her. Outside in the corridor he said very quickly :

“You are the nurse. What does the doctor say of her?—is it hopeless?—for God’s sake say that this is not a hopeless case, for she is everything to me!”

“I am one of the governesses of this institution,” said Miss Christopherson, with a calmness which afforded a strange contrast to the visitor’s excitement, “not the nurse. The doctor thinks that there is very little hope.”

“And what do you think?” he asked anxiously, as though her opinion, even against a medical man’s, would be of value to him, and he would cling to some faint hope himself.

“I thought that there was a chance until to-night.”

“I can’t believe this—oh! I will not believe it!” he cried wildly. “God would never be so cruel to me!”

“Hush, sir!” said Miss Christopherson, shocked by his vehemence; “you forget yourself and me.”

“I beg your pardon,” he said humbly; “I have forgotten myself and you—I apologise. But this is a dead brother’s child. She is as much alone in the world as I am; and we two together might have been of comfort to each other, if it had pleased Him who now afflicts us.”

He spoke between his set teeth, as if he rebelled against his trials, and felt himself a man much injured by his Maker. Miss Christopherson shuddered as she became conscious of the depth of his despair.

“You had better return to the room—the child is quick, and will guess all that you have been saying.”

“Do you think so?” he said, with a scared look at the governess. “Let us return, then; she must not have that thought upon her mind, it might throw her back; for she will get better—oh! yes, she will get better!”

When his hand was on the door, which he had closed upon leaving the room, he said suddenly:

“You were in Spitalfields to-night, I think. You told young Bridge to find me out?”

“Yes,” was the reply.

“Suspecting that my son would not send the intelligence in time to be of use; why did you think that, may I ask? He is,” he added slowly, “a very good son to me.”

“I suggested to Master Bridge that he might be of use in endeavouring to discover you,” said Miss Christopherson. “It struck me that Mr. Spanswick of Junction Street might even forget his cousin’s illness.”

“He has a very good memory,” said the senior Spanswick thoughtfully. “He would have taken every pains to find me out.”

“I am glad to hear that.”

“He—but she will wonder very much what we are talking about,” he cried. “Poor Jenny!”

He passed at once into the room, and went to the bedside again—taking a chair close to the sick girl, who smiled faintly as he came back to her.

“You have been—” she began.

“Yes, talking of you,” he said interrupting her; “of what the doctor says, Jenny; and how strong you will get if you only try, my dear, now that the worst is over and the old times are coming back. You will be running about with all the rest of them soon, just as if nothing had happened. But you must try, you know; you must not give way; you must eat and drink and grow strong. We must not have any fancies, Jenny dear.”

He seemed to assure himself rather than her, for he rubbed his thin hands together and spoke

almost with cheerfulness, until her dark inquiring eyes met his and made his heart flinch. Still he went on with increasing volubility, and spoke of the doctor's consolatory words with an eloquence and decisiveness which took Miss Christopherson's breath away.

"What a clever doctor, to know all this!" said Jenny with a little sigh; "and how sly of him to keep it from me, and look always so grave when he comes to feel my pulse, as if he did not believe the truth himself! Perhaps he doesn't."

"You're all right, Jenny," Mr. Spanswick said firmly. "You have been frightening yourself to death—that is, out of your wits, I mean—and the people here have kept you much too low."

He scowled at Miss Cristopherson, as if he considered that she had had a hand in that. Jenny looked in her direction also, and murmured:

"I have been very anxious—oh, more anxious than I can tell you now—to see you. I

wanted to ask you something which I can't well ask before anybody else."

"Indeed!" said Uncle William; "what's that?"

"Wait a moment—let me think," she replied.

Miss Christopherson understood the child, and said: "I will leave you with your uncle, Jenny, for a while. If you want me, Mr. Spanswick, please to touch that hand-bell. I shall be in the next room."

Miss Christopherson withdrew, and Jenny whispered,

"I don't know what I should have done without *her*. She has been very kind to me."

"I don't like the look of her myself," muttered William Spanswick; "there's a something in her head just here, Jenny," he said, touching his own forehead, "which speaks of a terrible temper—of a woman who would have her own way, or die for it. I should think, now, that the orphans here had rather a sharp time of it, if she has much to do with them."

“Ah, you do not know her,” said Jenny; “I only liked her a little when I was well, for she *was* hard with the lessons now and then; but, oh, when I fell ill I saw how good and brave she was directly. She has never left me—and they were all afraid of me except herself. Why, even the doctor was afraid, I think; and I know that she told him so, for they don’t speak now.”

“She stood by you like that?” he said.

“Yes, she did indeed.”

“I like the look of her now, as I would like the look of an angel,” he said heartily.

“I was sure you would when you knew all,” she answered.

There was a pause after Jenny’s defence of Miss Christopherson, a long and awkward pause, which William Spanswick did not seem capable of breaking. He sat with his head upon his chest, as if he had fallen into deep thought; he appeared to be waiting for something strange which was not to be avoided, and which he might find it difficult to combat, for all the wisdom of his fifty years. There was some-

thing which she wished to say to him, and he only knew of one subject that he had not the courage to encounter, though he had wished it, and looked forward to it many times—hoping and believing that it would some day come to him with a blessing in its revelation. He was conscious that the dark eyes of the child were fixed upon him with strange earnestness, but he did not regard her again; he knew that she was reading every line of his face as she had never read it yet in all her life. Lying there so long, and now, Heaven help her! perhaps so close upon the end, should he tell her a great lie? Would that Heaven have mercy on him and his one hope if he did?

He felt her hand touch his, but he did not look at her.

“*Father!*” she said, in a low whisper.

He trembled, and there were tears in his eyes which brimmed over, though he hid them from her.

“Father! it *is* father, is it not?” she asked, more softly still.

“Why should you think so, Jenny?” he replied, in tones as low as hers; “what has made you think—of that?”

“I have thought so for two years past,” she said; “it came upon me by degrees, and I did not like to ask you, did not like to know, lest it should be wrong. But if I am to die, as they all say I must, I—I thought that I should like to be quite sure.”

“Which would you have me be, or wish me to be?” he said, turning to her with a new eagerness.

“My father!”

“The uncle would be all that was honest and affectionate, Jenny,” he said, speaking very slowly; “able to look you in the face as you grew up, and be to you all that a father should be, save in name; the father you would despise more with every day, until the time would come for you to tell him so.”

“No, no, that could not be!” she cried; “for I should be your daughter always, sharing all your troubles, if you would let me.”

“If I would!”

“And dying here, not knowing you, passing to heaven—I hope it’s heaven, for I have not done much wrong, and am only fourteen, you know—I should be glad to hear you call me daughter once.”

“Oh! my dear daughter, whom I love so much, you must not die, but live!—live to teach me the way to heaven along with you!”

He clasped her in his arms and kissed her passionately, and father and child shed tears of joy and sorrow, strangely commingled in that hour of revelation.

“I will never say a word of this—I think I know why I should not,” said Jenny.

“If you leave me, I will tell them all,” he said fiercely; “it will not matter then what becomes of such a wretch as I am. I shall be glad to tell them.”

“Hush—too loud!”

“I will tell them that my brother’s death in Paris was passed off as my own, and that you were not an orphan child, Jenny,” he cried;

“and they may hang me for it, if the law will let them. What shall I care?”

“Is this so great a crime?” asked Jenny, wonderingly.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“You have no right here. It is only a dead father that gives you a claim to this charity.”

“Ah! I see.”

“Starvation and ruin—the workhouse school for you, the workhouse ward for me—were before me, and this. I chose this,” he said, his voice sinking to a low whisper again.

“You may make it up to them some day?” she said eagerly; “who knows what may happen after I am gone, or what good luck may come to you? Don’t let us think of it now.”

“You have thought of it too much already, Jenny,” he replied sadly; “it has weighed upon your mind at a time when it should have had nothing to disturb it, and reduced you very low. Why, it has almost killed you!” he added with a groan.

"Perhaps I may get well now, for I feel happier and stronger in knowing it is as I wished, and as I prayed."

"An odd thing to pray for. It would have been better, Jenny, to have left me with my secret until you had done with the establishment."

"You forget again," said Jenny sadly.

"No, I don't," he answered; "do you think I should be sitting here so coolly, if I had a doubt of your getting better? Oh, you are sure to get well. I look forward—I always did. You must not think differently from me," he added; "you only feel weak after your illness, and perhaps the clergyman has been frightening you, child—a clergyman will if he can, though he never seems particularly frightened himself. You are to live—I am sure you are to live."

"Miss Christopherson would say that it was wrong to talk like that, father."

"Miss Christopherson knows nothing about it," he answered; "and now, do not say 'father' again—it's a name which might escape you at

an awkward moment, and do you and me harm. I am in your power, child."

"Ah, you are sorry that you have told me—you don't trust me."

"I trust you," he said. "You know the consequences, and as you get stronger, so you will be on your guard for the sake of the old father from whom you have scared his secret by all that silly talk of dying. Why, Jenny, you are better already!"

"I will try hard to get better."

"That's well."

She lay and thought for a moment, then she said :

"Is Marmaduke my brother?"

"Thank God, no," replied her father quickly.

"I am glad of that," said the invalid. "Then it was his—"

"You must not ask any more questions, Jenny," he said, interrupting her. "Let the past be; it is an unpleasant one to me, as you will know presently—as you must know now. It—"

He was interrupted in his turn by the entrance of Miss Christopherson.

"You are talking too much to my little patient," she said, "and forgetting that she is very weak, Mr. Spanswick. I hope that this confidential interview is at an end."

"We have had scarcely confidences to exchange," said William Spanswick. "Jenny has been anxious about her uncle—she is low and nervous, that is all."

"Let us hope that that is all," said Miss Christopherson somewhat coldly.

She went back to her old seat by the fire, and thought there for a while; then she got up, and took her keys from her pocket.

"I will see you out now, Mr. Spanswick," she said.

"Yes, I think it is time," he said, rising at this emphatic hint. "I am robbing poor Jenny of her night's rest, and a night's rest is everything to her."

Miss Christopherson bowed slightly, as if in assent to this remark, and William Spanswick

thought once more that he did not admire the look of her head, or believe in her general affability. But she had been kind to his child, was his second thought, and had stood by her in a disease from which most people shrunk away, and so Heaven bless her for her unselfishness !

“I may come and see her when I please, now that she is ill ?” he asked of Miss Christopher-son.

“Yes, when you please,” was the reply ; “and you had better favour me with your address as well,” she added, after he had bidden Jenny good-bye, and was proceeding along the corridor by the governess’s side.

He mentioned it at once, and she said that she had a good memory, and should not forget it.

“I should like to call every morning and evening for a little while, if it be not too great a trouble,” he said deferentially. “I have had all my life a great interest in that girl.”

“Yes, I suppose so,” was the answer.

It was an answer which made him start for

an instant, and glance at her nervously ; but the governess was looking calmly ahead of her, and it must have been only his conscience, his own fears, which had been suddenly aroused that night, that had suggested that there was anything strange, or of meaning, in her answer to him.

“ And I shall be no great trouble ? ”

“ Not if you do not stop too long,” she answered.

When they were crossing the quadrangle, he said suddenly,

“ And do you think—you that have watched her through all her illness, as she tells me—that she will die ? Do you really think so, now ? ”

“ Thinking so, I came in search of you to-night. Otherwise, Mr. Spanswick——”

“ Otherwise——” he repeated as she paused.

“ It might have been better for you to keep away.”

Again he glanced towards her. Had she been listening ? Was it possible that she could have heard a word of anything that he and

Jenny had said, even if her sense of honour had not restrained her from eavesdropping?

“Why?” he ventured to ask.

“You have disturbed Jenny. A visit here is an event. Orphan children have few friends.”

“It is natural. Only such poor relations as those of which I am a sample cling to the little ones, and are not very reputable or welcome visitors.”

“There are stated days for visits.”

“Yes, I know.”

“Of which you have only twice availed yourself, Mr. Spanswick, during the last two years.”

“Yes,” he replied, “but Jenny has been to see me—when I had my little home in the country last year, for instance—and I have written to her very often. I have felt myself in the way here until this crisis. Now, Miss Christopherson, my visits will become very frequent until she is out of danger. I think I have said that I should like to call every morning and evening, and to see her at least once a day?”

"There will be no objection offered to your visits by the authorities."

"And when she is out of danger I shall not trouble you any more," he said.

"Thank you," she answered drily.

He did not like her manner. Standing at the iron gates, looking down at her pale face as she unlocked them—the cold, unimpressive, hard face, as he thought—he liked her manner worse than ever. "I am afraid," he said slowly, almost abjectly, as though he feared that here was an enemy before him, "that I have inconvenienced you very much to-night. The hour is late, and my visit has been most untimely."

"I am glad that you have called ; I said so when I first admitted you," she said.

"Yes, but——"

"Glad for the sake of the child, who has been strange in her manner, and very anxious about you," she said, interrupting him ; "we wrote to you first, and the letter was returned."

"Ay, very likely. I am not long in one place. I travel for my son at times."

"Mr. Marmaduke Spanswick of Junction Street told me so this evening."

"Indeed!" he said.

The gate was opened, but he did not pass through it at once. Something was on his mind, and he hesitated.

"Have you anything more to say to me, Mr. Spanswick?" she inquired.

"Nothing," he replied; "save to thank you with all my heart for that kindness to my niece of which she has spoken, and for which I, as well as she, am deeply grateful. Believe me, young lady, that I am deeply and intensely grateful."

The young lady thus addressed inclined her head slowly, but did not respond to this ebullition of feeling.

"And I may be able to prove some day that I have not forgotten your kindness to poor Jenny."

"Poor Jenny!" she said, rather to herself than him.

"You have no faith in her recovery," he said.

“You will not see her with my eyes, or hope with me.”

“Her mind is at rest—she may possibly recover. I have not much hope.”

“She will live, oh! she will live! I do not think for an instant of her dying.”

“I see that; and yet it might be so much the best for her.”

He had passed through the gate after an elevation of his unwieldly hat, and she was looking through the railings, and turning the key in the lock after him. Yes, it was a strange set face; the gray eyes were so large and cold that he did not care to meet them.

“I do not see how it could be for the best.”

“She has been here from six years of age, she tells me; she has had eight years of a quiet, peaceful, truthful life, and knows nothing of the world lying beyond these gates. If she recover, she will pass in another year from this asylum to that world and you.”

She turned and went rapidly from the gates, leaving him peering through them as she had

found him at an earlier hour of that dark damp morning.

He walked away at last, full of thought, and with no trace of that philosophy in him of which he had boasted to Mr. White in his lodgings not long since.

“Can she suspect me?” he muttered, as he set his face towards town.

CHAPTER VII.

A SKIRMISH.

NO one had any doubt at twelve o'clock on Sunday morning that Jenny Spanswick was worse. The meeting with "Uncle William" did not appear to have had the desired effect; from the moment that he had taken his departure she had become more feverish and restless. Mrs. Thurtle, the lady-superintendent, expressed it as her opinion, when the news was brought to her, that it was all Miss Christopherson's fault, and that Miss Christopherson should have known better than to have admitted this relation in the middle of the night, and thus have disturbed the child unnecessarily. She should have used more discretion, Mrs. Thurtle considered. The doctor said he thought so too;

but then he had not liked Miss Christopherson since the day on which she had hinted that he was afraid of his patient's malady, and he gave orders that no one was to see Jenny Spanswick again without his permission first accorded.

William Spanswick was told this by the porter at the oaken gates—the iron gates were not closed in the daytime—and the effect upon him was not that which the functionary had bargained for.

“Who says this? who gives this order?” he asked, with a sudden ferocity which startled the man in office.

“I had it from the lady-superintendent.”

“She has no right to keep me out, if the child is worse; the child may die without me. Tell the lady-superintendent or Miss Christopherson that I have come some miles to see the girl.”

“The lady-superintendent is at church,” said the porter, endeavouring to shut the oaken gate, which he had incautiously opened, and in which act he was balked by Mr. Spanswick's

foot being in the way. "You can call to-night and hear how the girl is."

"I tell you that I will see her!" cried Spanswick.

"Hullo! you must not make that row here," said the porter, who thought it high time that he asserted his authority, after being shouted at by one of the shabbiest fellows whom he had seen for many a day, "or you'll have a policeman after you. People who come here have generally civil tongues in their heads; it answers better. You'll let me shut the gate—O Lord!"

William Spanswick had thrust the gate back with no small strength for a man who did not appear to be strong; and the porter, unprepared for the movement, was caught in the chest, and sent ungracefully staggering towards his lodge-door. Before he could recover himself, William Spanswick was half across the quadrangle, and before he was up with him again, the intruder was at the door which Miss Christopherson had unlocked for him a few hours ago.

“You’ll have to suffer for this!” gasped forth the porter; “you’ll have——”

“I will not take an answer from you,” said William Spanswick, turning, and regarding the man so fiercely that he backed a step or two again; “this is a matter of life and death, and I will have no messages by servants.”

Miss Christopherson opened the door before he had ceased speaking. From the window of her room she had seen the altercation, and guessed the reason for it. She had hastened down the stairs to confront William Spanswick.

“What is the meaning of this?” she said indignantly; “why are you two men brawling together on a Sabbath morning?”

“He says he will come in,” cried the porter. “He’s bust the rim of my hat, which was very nearly the bridge of my nose, mum; and he’s banged against my chest orful with the gate.”

“Jenny—she’s worse, then, Miss Christopherson?” said Spanswick eagerly; “he tells me that my girl’s worse.”

“Yes, and if you wish to kill her outright,

you can see her," said Miss Christopherson.

"Oh! so bad as that!" and the man wrung his hands together; "then——"

He did not finish his sentence, and Miss Christopherson said,

"The doctor tells me that you must not see her yet, and I think that it is best."

"But if she dies——"

"She shall not die without seeing you again, William Spanswick; I promise you that."

"But——"

"There is no immediate danger; she is simply worse this morning. She is not quite herself; when she dozes, her mind wanders strangely, and she says strange things."

Mr. Spanswick, in his concern for his daughter, did not heed these words, but he remembered them afterwards, and they rendered him anxious.

"Who is with her?"

"I wait upon her myself; she does not like the nurse much."

"Then go back to her, please," he said quick-

ly ; “she is naturally nervous, and if she has already missed you, it may excite her. I am detaining you ; I will call again this afternoon, and once more in the evening. Perhaps, if she is better, Miss Christopherson, they will let me see her in the evening?” he added very anxiously.

“I am afraid that they will not allow you to see her to-day.”

“Ask the doctor ; ask Jenny if she thinks that I should be a trouble to her.”

He walked away hurriedly, forgetting in his haste to apologise to the porter whose hat he had broken, and whose nose he had grazed ; and that gentleman went back to his lodge, aggrieved at the want of attention which Miss Christopherson had paid to his complaint. When the children came back from church—there was no chapel or chaplain attached to this establishment, and a long row of little ones in green skirts, and straw bonnets with green ribbons, filed through the gate with Mrs. Thurtle, heavy in furs and velvets, as befitted a lady-

superintendent, bringing up the rear—the man with the large hat and the wild hairy face was pacing up and down in front of the asylum still. Mrs. Thurtle was not in the habit of accompanying the orphans to church as a rule, but usually spent her Sundays with some fashionable relations in the west of London, leaving the principal governess in charge; but there were times when it was necessary to show that “her heart,” as she expressed it, “was in her work.” The appearance of William Spanswick—and a very disreputable appearance it was in the sun—struck her as peculiar; and the wistful look which he directed towards her, seemed so suggestive of indiscriminate almsgiving, that she had already begun to inform him that she had nothing to give away, when he raised his hat respectfully, and stepped aside.

“What is that man waiting about here for?” she asked of the porter, as he held the oaken gates back.

Peter saw his opportunity, and availed himself of it immediately.

“He’s been about here all the morning, mum,” he said, with great volubility, after taking a long breath by way of a start. “He’s been asking for Miss Christopherson and you, and a-saucing me because I said he couldn’t come in, and a-using the most frightful language; and he sent the gate bang back against me in his violence, and damaged the institution’s hat; and I’ve had such a pain in my chest ever since that I ain’t been able to stand upright. He would come in; and he bounced across the square before I could stop him, and Miss Christopherson came down and spoke to him.”

“What did she say to this man’s insolence?”

“Well, mum, she asked him if he’d be kind enuf to call again in the afternoon, and also in the evening, when she’d ask the doctor if he might stop a bit.”

“I will inquire into this matter.”

Mrs. Thurtle immediately went to her davenport in the drawing-room, and wrote as follows:

“The lady-superintendent requests Miss Christopherson to report as to the disturbance which

has occurred this morning at the gates of the institution."

This missive was despatched by Mrs. Thurtle's special attendant to an attendant of the establishment, who was to wait for an answer, but on no account to go near the room wherein Jenny Spanswick was having another sharp battle for her life. The answer arrived in due course by the same means of communication.

"Miss Christopherson believes that Mr. Spanswick was excited by the doctor's order that he was not to see Jane."

"Curt," said Mrs. Thurtle to herself. "I never liked that young woman; she is too independent: I must get her out. I said she should go long since."

And as Mrs. Thurtle was all-powerful in office, and had a happy facility for working out of the establishment those young ladies who were in any way objectionable to her, it was possible from that moment that Maud Christopherson's days were numbered at the City Clerks' Orphan Asylum. Mrs. Thurtle was fond of homage, and

Miss Christopherson had not paid her any great degree of reverence. Miss Christopherson had been two years in the establishment, had been selected from about fifty candidates by the governing committee, at whose preference Mrs. Thurtle had wondered ever since, and had been so precise in the performance of her duties that it had been a difficult task to find anything to complain of. But the governess had not been impressed by the hauteur or the condescension of the lady-superintendent. She had presented always the same calm, almost indifferent aspect to her; had taken her orders and obeyed them with a grave composure that was at times particularly aggravating. And to Mrs. Thurtle's mind this governess had always been an aggravating young person. She was very reserved, she did not appear to have any relations or friends; the children in the establishment did not think her very genial, and occasionally discovered her to be very severe on their shortcomings; and it was only that odd objectionable orphan, Jenny Spanswick, who had seemed

in any way to take to her of all the living creatures in the place.

She was a clever governess and a good disciplinarian. She was better than the other half-dozen, for the matter of that, thought Mrs. Thurtle in her heart ; but she had committed the unpardonable fault of not being impressed by the high position to which Mrs. Thurtle had attained. When she spoke to her, it was as if she were unconscious of the great gulf of class division which separated one from another ; and then—here was a second offence which Mrs. Thurtle as a woman never forgave—though she dressed quietly and in good taste, it was evident to the lady-superintendent that Miss Christopherson spent every shilling of her salary upon her back. She was certain that last black silk had cost half a guinea a yard, if it had cost a farthing ; and a young person in Miss Christopherson's position should have known better than to purchase a material so costly that even Mrs. Thurtle, with a salary of four hundred pounds per annum, and with a suite of apart-

ments and gas and coals provided, would have hesitated before indulging in the luxury. She did not like Miss Christopherson, and she was almost sure that Miss Christopherson did not like her; and the doctor, who came once a-day to see to the general ailments of the children, had also told Mrs. Thurtle, that of all the cool, independent, argumentative young women whom he had ever met in the long course of his professional career, Miss Christopherson was the most astounding specimen. She—she—she,” Doctor Parker stuttered a little when he was excited, “—actually had—had—had—the audacity to t-t-t-tell him that she thought that he was n-n-n-n-nervous in little Sp-Sp-Sp-Spanswick’s case.”

So Miss Christopherson was not loved much at the City Clerks’ Orphan Asylum, and from hints that she had let drop in the course of this history, it is probable she was aware of the fact, and that it even depressed her a little and rendered her, even with herself—for she was a thoughtful woman—somewhat dissatisfied. Jenny

Spanswick's sudden fancy for her had startled her considerably ; for Jenny in full health had not taken any more notice of her than the rest of the children had. But her morbid reasoning on the subject had reduced itself to the following : Jenny was grateful for the attention she had received when so many of the officials were afraid of her. When Jenny was better she would fall back into her old place amongst the children, as was natural, as she would wish herself that Jenny should. She did not want affection, she did not seek it. She had scarcely come to the institution in the hope of gaining any. She was aware how natural it was for everybody to dislike her ; she was a woman who spoke her mind, and had not the gift of impressing favourably those people who crossed her path. At home she had been very much disliked—of course she had, or she would not have been where she was then—and the poor had toadied, not respected her. It was her unlucky gift, she believed—possibly with a naïve conceit, for all her dull thoughts—to see

farther into the hearts of people than most women of her age ; and encountering that selfishness, or that vanity, or that falseness about her which asserted itself as a virtue, an accomplishment, or a truth, she had had the courage to say she saw it ; and this, allied to her ungracious manner, which she could not help, she was certain, had not set a crowd of friends round her. She shrugged her shoulders, and thought that she was glad of it ; but she was conscious of becoming a firmer, a duller, and even a more suspicious woman. Perhaps Mrs. Thurtle was right, and Miss Christopherson was a “very odd young person.”

She was odd enough to see William Spanswick when he called again in the afternoon, and to assure him that Jenny was sleeping calmly ; and in the evening, knowing his time to the minute, she was at the gate to break to him the intelligence that the doctor considered it would not be safe to disturb the child by a visit at so late an hour.

“But she is better this evening,” she added.

“ You are sure of that ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Quite sure of that, Miss Christopherson ? ”

“ Why should I try to deceive you ? ”

He did not relish this rejoinder, and Miss Christopherson spoke with a sharpness that startled him. For about the twentieth time it struck him that Miss Christopherson was a young woman to be wary of.

“ In a case of this urgency I am sure that you would not,” he said slowly ; “ and you—yes, you—take a load from my heart. I may see her to-morrow, then ? ”

“ Yes, to-morrow morning, if she is no worse.”

“ Thank you.”

He bowed low, as if in gratitude, and would have expressed his thanks to her, had not Miss Christopherson bade him a hasty good-night, and departed with an unlooked-for rapidity from his presence.

Peter, the instant afterwards, slammed the door in his face, and William Spanswick walked away.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONVALESCENT.

JENNY was better the next day, and William Spanswick saw his daughter for a few minutes ; on the Tuesday she was not quite so well ; on the Wednesday she was better again ; and from that day she continued to improve. And as Jenny grew stronger by degrees, she spoke less of her uncle William, and that gentleman began gradually to assume a new, cool, philosophic air, which was strangely at variance with his past excitement.

“I do not think, Miss Christopherson,” he said one afternoon, about a fortnight after this, when Jenny—a wan, large-eyed child—was sitting by the fireside in a chair, propped up by

cushions, "that I need trouble you and excite the porter downstairs by further visits to my niece. She is in a fair way towards recovery, and I have my business to attend to. You have been kind, and Jenny and her poor uncle will always remember you with gratitude."

"I have done my duty, Mr. Spanswick," said Miss Christopherson, closing a small book that she had been reading, "and I have been paid for it."

"But not with my uncle's thanks," said Jenny, "nor with mine. Why, I am sure without you I should have died."

"I took my place here as a matter of course, not as a matter of affection," replied Miss Christopherson, almost pettishly. "I cannot say that I should have liked to catch the smallpox, or that I would not have evaded my duty if I had been able; but there is nothing to thank me for."

"Oh! Miss Maud—Miss Christopherson I must say now, I suppose?" she added, with a wistful look towards her.

"If you please," replied the governess; "I think it will be best."

"Very well," said Jenny, somewhat sadly.

"And as for dying without my help," added the governess, "have you been here all these years and failed to learn where your gratitude should be placed?"

"Yes—yes, I know that, Miss Christopherson. I have prayed, I—I hope I have been thankful. Don't you remember one night teaching me a new prayer? I shan't forget it ever again, and——"

"I did not teach you; you were afraid to die, and said it yourself. I teach you to pray, indeed!" she added, almost scornfully.

"Miss Christopherson is religious, then?" said William Spanswick, regarding her almost suspiciously.

"No, I am not. I wish I were."

He continued to stare at her so intently, that she said, after a moment's deliberation,

"Why do you ask?"

"Pardon me," he replied, "it was a liberty

to ask the question. I am an inquisitive and garrulous mendicant."

"Still you had a reason for asking?"

"Ye-es."

"What was it?"

"Well," he said frankly, "I am not a religious man. I have suffered in my time from people professing to be religious, and hence I have grown suspicious, perhaps uncharitable. If you had preached at me or Jenny, I should not have liked you, and I wish, Miss Christopherson, to carry away with me the grateful remembrance of one who was very good to *her*."

"I have nursed Jenny at the request of the lady-superintendent," said Maud Christopherson; "thank Mrs. Thurtle as you leave this place, not me."

"And though Jenny has not been in any danger, and I have not been in the least nervous concerning her—you may remember that I said she would recover very speedily—still, you have been attentive and kind, and thank you I do with all my heart."

He bowed, and Miss Christopherson kept her full gray eyes upon him.

“How old are you, Mr. Spanswick?” she asked.

William Spanswick stared dreamily at this inquiry, but answered,

“Fifty.”

“And your son Marmaduke, of that tragic business in Spitalfields, thirty, I should say. You must have married at an early age.”

“I did.”

“Good afternoon. Were I you, I would call on Mrs. Thurtle, Mr. Spanswick, and thank her as you go away.”

“Thank you for your advice, Miss Christopherson; I will do so.”

Miss Christopherson laid her book on the chair she had quitted—it was a small volume with a yellow-paper cover—and went from the room, closing the door behind her. Mr. Spanswick looked at his daughter, after the door was shut, and said in a low eager tone,

“Jenny, you have not told her?”

"I? Oh! no, not for the world!"

"I don't like her manner; I don't like her."

"Oh, father!"

"Hush; say 'uncle,' " he cried. "No, I don't like her; I try hard, but I cannot. She looks like a woman who knows too much."

"It is fancy."

For a man who prided himself on his self-possession, he was easily disturbed that afternoon. He looked down at the narrow strip of carpet which went round the bed, he shuffled his feet uneasily, he bit the finger-nails of his right hand, which Jenny saw was shaking a little as it was raised towards his mouth.

"Yes, it must be fancy," he said at last; "but there's an awful sharpness about that woman which keeps one uneasy, and you must be eternally on your guard so long as she is with you, Jenny. She is one of the good women, all justice and no mercy, I know."

"Oh! you cannot know that."

"Yes, I can," he said quickly to her; "I guess it. But I should be a brute, if I were not

glad to see you strong again, and grateful to her who has helped so much to your recovery. What are they going to do with you, Jenny, now?"

"I shall go back to school next week, unless any notice is taken of what Miss Christopherson says."

"What does she say?"

"That I ought to go out of town for a week or two, into the country, or to the seaside somewhere; and she has spoken to Mrs. Thurtle about it."

"And Mrs. Thurtle?"

"I think she would be very glad to see me go; she's frightened," said Jenny, with a suppressed giggle. "Oh! dear, isn't she dreadfully frightened of me!"

"What a holiday it would be! And perhaps they would farm you out somewhere, and I could walk down and see you, Jenny."

"Miss Christopherson would be sent with me, I think; for they are afraid of her too."

"I'm afraid of her," he muttered; "for an-

other year I must be afraid of them all, till they have found a place for you, Jenny, or I am able to come here and say, 'Times have changed with me; I am in a position to support my niece, and to keep her from the degradation of service.' Great heaven—service!"

He stamped his foot upon the floor, and Jenny looked nervously towards him.

"You must write and tell me all the news, Jenny, and to what part of the country you are going. I think the committee will send you into the country. And now, my dear desolate girl, good-bye."

"Good-bye."

He put his arms round her, and kissed her face several times, pausing at last with his two thin hands upon the child's shoulders.

"Another year and you will be fifteen," he said, "and it is likely—it is more than likely—that we shall have a home to go to. I have been saving money," he added huskily, "I have been scraping money together for you and me

to begin the world afresh; don't tell a soul of that."

"Ah, you have been starving yourself for me!" cried Jenny.

"Oh! no, I live well," he said hastily; "don't get that idea into your head, girl; Marmaduke is a prince of a fellow, and pays me liberally for the services I render him. I have more money than I know what to do with."

"I shouldn't have thought it," said Jenny, as she looked at her father's threadbare suit, and Marmaduke Spanswick's cast-off hat, which he was holding in his hand.

"Appearances are deceptive, Jenny; you have written that wise precept in your copy-book; you have——"

He stopped suddenly, left Jenny's side, and went across the room to the chair on which Miss Christopherson had placed the book she had been perusing.

"What is the matter?" asked Jenny.

"Nothing; only what a book to seek amusement from! 'An Account of the Asylum for

the City Clerks' Female Orphans, Camberwell.' I should have thought that she had enough of the reality of the establishment. Good God!" he cried in a louder tone.

"What is it now?" and Jenny sprung to her feet.

"Hush! nothing, nothing; you are not to excite yourself, and there is nothing to be alarmed at; you must always imitate my presence of mind, and not let little matters unnerve you. Some one—he was a deuced clever fellow, Jenny—has said, that if we give way to little troubles, the great ones in due course will crush the life from us."

"But is there any little trouble there?" asked Jenny, pointing to the book.

"No, only a list of subscribers, with your *dead* father's name down for fifty pounds,—ah, I was rich and generous then!—and the donation has startled me. What a heap of money it seems now!"

"Have you quite finished your leave takings?" inquired Miss Christopherson as she entered.

“Yes,” said William Spanswick; “and Jenny has promised to get strong, for her old uncle’s sake.”

“I think she will get on now.”

“She tells me there is a chance of her going into the country.”

“Yes, there is a faint chance. It is only the expense, I believe, which stands in the way. Our funds are not particularly flourishing just now.”

She glanced at the book in Mr. Spanswick’s hand, and he said :

“I have taken the liberty of inspecting this. The donations and subscriptions appear to be large.”

“They have been large in their time, but this is an establishment that has absorbed an immense amount of money. It is not a well-managed institution, according to my own ideas, and the money has not been judiciously spent.”

“Perhaps not; money very seldom is. But fortunately there has been plenty to spend, and in a good work.”

"Fresh charities spring up, and the old ones get out of fashion," said Miss Christopherson.

"And yet here is a recent donation from one M. L. of three thousand pounds. That is a windfall, surely."

"How do you know that that is a recent donation?"

"This is the new report, I perceive, dated in the present year."

"Oh, you have not seen that; will you take it with you? It may amuse you, Mr. Spanswick, as you are interested in the asylum."

"I am robbing you."

"I can get another."

William Spanswick looked hard at her, as if her manner were still objectionable, let him try ever so hard to like her who had been kind to Jenny. He put the book in his pocket, with his eyes still fixed upon her. He muttered his thanks again for all past interest in his "niece;" then kissed his child, made a low bow and went away. Outside in the corridor he waited for a few moments, as though he ex-

pected that Miss Christopherson would follow him; and as he leant his back against the wall he panted as if suffering from some violent exertion which had robbed him of his breath. Once a key turned in a lock near him, and he stood upright and grim, a man on guard again; but Miss Christopherson did not appear, and he once more sought the wall for his support, and wiped his face and forehead with his handkerchief, like a man who found that winter's afternoon extremely hot and enervating. He went on at last, slowly descending the stairs which led to the door that opened on the quadrangle. Here he encountered the porter, who had never forgiven him that Sunday's irreverent skirmish.

"Peter," he said with a sudden and easy familiarity, "will you be kind enough to show me to the lady-superintendent's apartments?"

"Are you told to go there?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then they're straight afore you."

"Thank you."

He walked towards that portion of the arcade

which an impatient gesture of Peter's hand and arm had indicated, and found himself regarding a mahogany door with "the Lady-superintendent's Office" written thereon in big white capitals. Here, after a moment's hesitation, he knocked, and one of the orphans—a big girl, growing rapidly out of her last institution-frock—responded to his summons.

"Is the lady-superintendent within?" he asked.

"Yes, I think she is."

"Will you tell her that Mr. Spanswick would be glad to see her, and to thank her before going away?"

The orphan retired, and presently another door at the end of a long passage opened, and Mrs. Thurtle was faintly visible in the distance to the short-sighted person who had requested an interview.

"That will do, my good man; don't come any nearer, please," she cried. "Your name is Spanswick, I think you said."

"Yes, ma'am," he said, bowing very low; "and

I have felt it my duty to call upon you, now that my visits here are no longer necessary, to thank you very humbly and very heartily for your great kindness in allowing me to see my niece so often ; for the great kindness, in fact, which has been shown her during her long illness by all the members of your estimable establishment."

"We have done our best—it has been a severe trial and a great anxiety—but we have done our best."

"To Miss Christopherson in particular, I, as Jenny's nearest surviving relative, am deeply indebted."

"Miss Christopherson has carried out her orders very well, I have no doubt," said Mrs. Thurtle, with a less degree of condescension suddenly apparent.

William Spanswick was a short-sighted man, but he was a man of quick observation in one respect. If he could not very clearly see her face, he understood at once her character.

"Miss Christopherson considers that all thanks

are due to you, madam, for the care which you have taken, and the kind orders for Jenny's comfort and security which it has pleased you to give ; and I have thought that you would not consider it a liberty if I ventured to express to you the deep sense of gratitude which I feel, and which I can only repay to a lady of your high position in words which spring from the heart."

Mrs. Thurtle was pleased at this attention, and she could not help bowing in return to William Spanswick's reverent obeisance.

"I hope we have done our best for Jane," she said.

"Jane tells me that there is a probability of sending her into the country for a week."

"Yes, I hope there is," said Mrs. Thurtle with alacrity. "It depends upon the committee's decision next Friday morning. I shall support the resolution with all my interest."

"Thank you. I am living in the country now," he said suddenly, as if a new suggestion had just occurred to him. "I have a little

cottage, in fact, with a piece of garden-ground, at Sevenoaks, and Jenny might stay with me for a week or two until she got quite well."

"Yes ; but there's Miss Christopherson, who might spread the infection over the whole place if she came direct from the infirmary. Thank you, thank you, my good man ; I will mention all you say to the board ; it is very kind of you, indeed. Good afternoon !"

He made another low bow, expressed his thanks again with easy fluency, and withdrew, leaving Mrs. Thurtle impressed with the conviction that Jenny Spanswick's uncle was quite a superior kind of individual. He went slowly out of the place, a man in deep thought. When he was in the street he said to himself,

"She wished me to do it ; did she think that I might find a friend in the principal, if things came to the worst?"

He took off his hat for coolness, and, as he went on, he staggered a little in his walk, like a man who had grown weak and ill, or who had been drinking. He put on his hat at last, and

drew from his pocket the Report of the Asylum for the City Clerks' Female Orphans, and read it eagerly, with the pamphlet very close to his eyes. He seemed to have grown weaker in the legs, or to have drunk more, as he read and re-read one particular paragraph which somebody—was it Miss Christopherson's hand, for mercy's sake? he wondered—had marked with a strong pencil-line.

The paragraph was one of many relating to the rules, which were stitched together with the list of contributors and guardians; it ran as follows:

“And should it be afterwards discovered that the father, or, in case both parents have been certified to be dead, either parent, of any child so admitted is alive, or that any fraudulent representation has been made relative to the parent's settlement, the child shall be immediately sent to the said parent or settlement. The following certificate and declarations, which are to be procured by application at the asylum, are required by the committee before any or-

phan girl can be placed on the list of candidates for admittance into the asylum ; and any person certifying or declaring anything therein which shall be untrue, is subject to two years' imprisonment."

Why had Miss Christopherson underlined the paragraph, if she had not known or guessed the lie which eight years ago had helped Jenny Spanswick to a home?

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. BRIDGE SETTLES HER LITTLE ACCOUNT.

THE committee met in the board-room of the asylum at eleven o'clock on the following Friday. The committee met once a fortnight to transact a little business, sift appeal claims, write a few cheques, and listen to any reports from officers or servants that might have been sent in during the last fourteen days. It was a fussy committee, that took up a deal of time over coffee and biscuits, and talked rather more of the public and political business of the day than of the private affairs appertaining to the institution. But this is a weakness common to board-meetings in general. It was about half-past twelve when the case of Jane Spanswick,

aged fourteen, came under notice of the gentlemen at the table; and when Mrs. Thurtle stated it as her opinion that it would be better, for the safety of the asylum, that Jane Spanswick should have a fortnight in the country than be thrown among the school-girls, and possibly disseminate this shocking malady far and wide, four gentlemen of the board were of Mrs. Thurtle's opinion; four considered that it was an unnecessary expense, and was establishing a bad precedent; one old fellow was for vaccinating everybody in the establishment, commencing with Mrs. Thurtle—who was very much alarmed at the suggestion, having recently been vaccinated surreptitiously, and being in doubt whether another operation might not be too much for her—and finishing with Peter at the gate; and a hardened member pooh-poohed everybody's suggestion but his own, which was that Jenny should remain in the infirmary for another month. The whole affair was about to be postponed until the next meeting, when a letter arrived by post from a subscriber of the

institution, addressed to the chairman of the committee then sitting.

It was a letter signed with the initials M. L.—the respectable initials of that benefactor who, a year ago, had forwarded a cheque for three thousand pounds to the institution—and the writer, in reminding the chairman of that donation, begged to express himself, or herself, as one who had proved that the interest of the orphan establishment had been not lightly studied. The writer had heard of a case of small-pox in the school, and trusted that no expense would be spared to keep the patient separated from the rest of the inmates of the asylum, and to send the sufferer with a trustworthy officer to the sea-side as soon as her convalescence would permit. And, as a further donation to the funds of the institution, M. L. begged to enclose a draft for twenty pounds.

“Where does M. L. get her information from?” asked the chairman; “this is very extraordinary.”

“I don’t care how much information she gets,

if she pays for it in this handsome manner," said another member laughing.

"I think it is rather a shabby donation for a person who can afford three thousand pounds in one lump," remarked the gentleman who had suggested universal vaccination.

"There's only one thing to consider : we cannot afford to disregard M. L.'s advice, I think," said the chairman.

"I don't see that," said the gentleman who had spoken before him.

The matter was put to the vote, and it was decided that Jenny Spanswick was to go to the sea-side for a fortnight. Then Mrs. Thurtle suggested that Miss Christopherson should accompany her, and said nothing of Mr. Spanswick's offer ; and that suggestion being also agreed to by the board, Miss Christopherson was informed in due course that the committee had voted five pounds for the expenses, considering that sum would be sufficient, used economically, to pay for board and lodging for a

fortnight in a humble locality, and for railway travelling there and back third class.

Miss Christopherson was summoned to the lady-superintendent's quarters to receive this information, which was delivered in a loud voice at the end of the long corridor, as in Uncle Spanswick's case.

"Very well, Mrs. Thurtle," said Miss Christopherson; "I suppose the board considers the money sufficient."

"Of course it is sufficient!" said Mrs. Thurtle sharply; "you do not require very grand apartments, I suppose?"

"Jane is used to large rooms here, at least."

"You must get the best rooms you can for your money—and I trust, Miss Christopherson, that you will not be wasteful or improvident, for I think less than a fortnight will not be of the slightest use to anybody."

"I daresay we shall be able to make the money last," replied the governess.

"I hope you will. It only requires a little prudence and a little economy on your part."

“Very well.”

“And it will be a nice holiday for you—extra leave, as it were.”

“Yes, it will be a holiday,” said Miss Christopherson wearily, “for I am rather tired.”

Tired of the asylum, she meant—tired of the orphans, who were not half so interesting in reality as they had appeared in the distance when the strange idea had beset her—she had been beset by many strange ideas through life—that she should like to live and move amongst them, an orphan with themselves.

“I shall come down to Hastings myself almost immediately,” said Mrs. Thurtle, “and see if you and Jenny are comfortable. My sister is staying in Robertson Terrace there.”

“Indeed!” said the governess, with languid interest.

Then Miss Christopherson returned to the infirmary, and Mrs. Thurtle sat down before the large library-table to resume her correspondence, and to shake her head over the small sign of gratitude which the governess had

shown for all the trouble that had been taken to place her on escort-duty.

Mrs. Thurtle was deep in the composition of a letter to M. L.—by order of the board—expressing the thanks of the committee for the donation and suggestion, and stating that her idea had already been decided upon when M. L.'s favour of the 14th instant had arrived; and she was composing her epistle with great care and suavity, and with an evident desire to impress the donor with her accomplishments as a correspondent, when her studies were intruded upon by a peculiar rapping on the panels of the door.

“Come in!” said Mrs. Thurtle absently; and a very small, thin, yellow old lady, in an old-fashioned black-beaver bonnet, entered the room with some difficulty, and immediately began dancing, or, rather, indulging in a series of tremulous movements of the arms and legs, that Mrs. Thurtle took for dancing at first sight.

“My good woman,” she said loftily, “what is the meaning of this unseemly behaviour? Why did you not knock at the outer door?”

“I knocked, but nobody answered.”

“You should have waited.”

“So I did,” answered the intruder, “until I was tired. I’m not strong—I’ve had a terrible trouble to find the place—it isn’t a day fit for a cat to be out.”

“What is the nature of your business?” asked Mrs. Thurtle, with an increasing severity of demeanour.

“I’ll tell you in a minute,” replied the little woman, seating herself on a vacant chair a little distance from Mrs. Thurtle, and proceeding to take off a pair of india-rubber goloshes, which she put on a corner of the superintendent’s desk, by way of retaining her property in her mind. “I have been running to keep myself warm, and my breath is not what it used to be. Yours isn’t, I daresay, though you are younger than I; but then you are a great deal stouter, and fat makes all the difference. Are you one of the governesses?”

“I am the lady-superintendent of this establishment, and I will thank——”

"Oh! pray don't thank me for anything," said the old lady, speaking with great volubility; "I have done nothing to oblige you; I have come to pay some money back that's owing to one of the governesses here. It's I that have to thank somebody, that's all."

"You had better go to the next door, my good woman," said Mrs. Thurtle; "and take those nasty india-rubber things away."

"It is not very likely that I am going to leave them here," said the old lady, eyeing the lady-superintendent more closely, and her sharp features taking a sharper expression for an instant; "this is the last present of a good grandson, though I don't say so to his face. You have a grandson perhaps, and will agree with me that it is not a good plan to flatter your juniors."

"Good morning," said Mrs. Thurtle, struggling hard to preserve her imperturbability, but dying to burst forth. A grandson, indeed! Whom could this objectionable old woman want to see at the City Clerks' Orphan Asylum?

She was not a lady, she was sure no lady would ever have worn such a bonnet; and yet there was an assumption of equality, and even independence, strangely at variance with her faded suit of black. The old lady began shaking again directly she was on her feet and had her goloshes in her hand.

"I shall find Miss Christopherson next door, then?" she asked.

"Oh! it's Miss Christopherson you want!" said Mrs. Thurtle. "Are you a friend of hers?"

"She's a friend of mine," was the reply.

Mrs. Thurtle did not see the distinction; but she was far too much annoyed—being a lady of uncertain temper—to see anything very clearly. Grandson, indeed!

"You had better ask the porter to fetch your friend," said Mrs. Thurtle; "and another time, please to remember that the servants of the establishment are generally seen after six o'clock in the evening."

"I am not likely to come here again. Pray don't excite yourself about me, ma'am;" here

her shaking hand dropped the goloshes, and the old lady went on her knees to pick them up, and appeared to be engaged in scouring the floor with them for a few minutes. "I trouble nobody—I am not likely to begin at my age. I shall only trespass upon Miss Christopherson's attention for a few minutes," she added, as she rose to her feet again, "and then get back to Spitalfields as fast as possible. But why a servant?"

A strong suspicion that the intruder had recently escaped from a lunatic asylum—there was a private madhouse within a few yards of them—seized Mrs. Thurtle at this instant, and she turned pale and found a difficulty in breathing as the little woman came hopping in a kind of kangaroo fashion towards the desk again, and put her yellow, wrinkled, stern face close to hers.

"I—I do not understand you."

"Why a servant?" repeated the visitor. "You called Miss Christopherson a servant, or implied that she was one, this minute. That

cannot be ; that is not very likely, under any circumstances."

"Miss Christopherson is a governess here, and consequently a servant of the establishment."

"Like yourself—oh, I see," said the little woman ; "for you know as well as I do that she is a real lady ; and real ladies—how rare they are ! Good morning !"

"Well, in all my life I never did," said Mrs. Thurtle to herself, after the departure of the visitor. "The insolence, the—the—oh, I'll give it to Miss Christopherson for this presently !"

Meanwhile the eccentric old lady had doubled herself together in a witch-like fashion, and gone in search of the porter. She was a woman who felt the cold acutely, for she shivered as she went on under the arcades, and appeared to experience a difficulty in breathing until she had grown accustomed to the keen north-easter which she had braved that February morning in coming thither. The porter was discovered ; and presently the governess of whom the old

lady was in search came down from the infirmary, to gaze almost with as much astonishment as Mrs. Thurtle had done at the strange visitor.

“You are the child I want,” said the old woman, upon seeing her. “I know the face well—it’s the real Christopherson face—I know you, though you were a baby when I saw you last.”

“What is it that you require of me?” asked the governess.

“My name is Bridge—old Deborah Bridge—the woman who left Brayling, in Dorset, to take care of an invalid daughter, who died, and then was just in time for the grandson who came to London to make his fortune. I knew your father—the handsome man!—before he died, and his father before him, when we Bridges were better off, and speculation had not ruined us. I knew your grandmother, and your mother when she was a vain beauty, and ran away with George Christopherson. I wonder what made her marry a Lawson after that—I never

liked the Lawsons, they were purse-proud toadstools!"

Mrs. Bridge spoke with the same volubility which had already astonished Mrs. Thurtle, and Miss Christopherson had great difficulty in following her.

"I do not remember you," she said, at last.

"You remember the name?"

"Well."

"I was in London a year after your father died, and left you—one of the prettiest girls in Dorset—to your mother's care. I said then, 'Poor little Maud!' Was that right?"

"It was true," said Miss Christopherson, sadly.

"Others said, 'Rich little Maud,' after I had gone; and then it became the rich Miss Lawson when your mother took the Lawson name, along with the stiff-necked man. I remember everything."

"Mrs. Bridge!" said Miss Christopherson, indignantly.

"I beg pardon—I hurt your feelings. I was never a refined woman, and my misfortunes

have not tended to make me more ladylike," she said. "I have not come, Miss Christopherson, to force myself upon you with a story of old times. The Bridges are poor, disagreeable people, and don't care for favours. They live, and—what a terrible draught there is, to be sure!"

"Will you come into my room for a few minutes?"

"Thank you, but I am pressed for time. You know what brings me here?"

"Curiosity, perhaps."

"You should know better than that," said Mrs. Bridge, diving her arm with some difficulty into a deep pocket. "I am never curious about other people's affairs, though it is a puzzle what puts you in this den, unless it's independence."

"It is independence."

"Ah! I think that I could work out all the story, if I had time," she said; "but I haven't; and Geoffry will wonder what has become of me. There's your money in that paper—two pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence—which

you were foolish enough to lend my boy. We have saved it up, and there it is, Miss Christopherson. The boy is getting on in his new situation, as I was sure he would, if he had a fair trial. Why, they have raised him another five shillings a week at the brewer's already. There's your money, and thank you."

"Thank you," said Miss Christopherson, very quietly, in her turn.

"I would not let the boy bring it, though he is sensible enough in his way for seventeen. He only thought you a poor governess, and it was a silly boy's fancy for a woman older than himself—my own boy had it in the country long ago—all boys have it, I daresay. And to think that it was you he used to stare at in church, instead of saying his prayers properly; and to walk from Spitalfields to this part of the world, too, after we had moved, coming back all of a glow on Sundays to say, 'Grandmother, I have seen her; she's looking prettier than ever. If that girl will only wait till I grow up, I'll have a try for her; see if I don't. It's the face I like,

the face I fancy ;' and so he used to run on like a mad boy, till I scolded him for his nonsense. And to think that it was you ! It's like a book. But all that nonsense has gone out of his head now. He's very sorry, he's heartily ashamed of himself ; he laughs at what a young fool he was—he's always laughing—though he would be very cross if he knew that I had been telling you all this."

"Your grandson must be a very odd boy."

"He is an odd boy ; I don't know what to make of him. It's a bad sign," she remarked, shaking her head, "when boys think of the girls too early. Have you anything else to say to me ?"

"Nothing. You can spare this money, Mrs. Bridge ?"

"Oh, yes. If we could not, you would have had it back all the same," was the ungracious answer ; "for I cannot bear favours, especially from your family, and that's the truth. I'd rather beg or borrow—I don't know that I would not steal—from a stranger than ask any-

one I have ever known for sixpence. But I think that this was none the less kind of you. Good day !”

“Good day !” said Miss Christopherson.

The old woman offered her shaking hand, and Miss Christopherson placed hers within it.

“If an old woman’s blessing is worth anything to you, take it, young lady,” she said.

“I take it,” said Miss Christopherson, bending her head as though it were descending upon her as she spoke.

“Then God bless you, Maud Christopherson !”

“Thank you. The last one who said ‘God bless you, Maud !’ was the handsome father of whom you have spoken to-day. I was a very little girl then, but how well I remember when he said it !”

“When they brought him home from the hunt in his fine scarlet suit ? He died in the great drawing-room before they could take him upstairs, I recollect. And you have been alone ever since ?”

“Yes, quite alone.”

“But your mother——”

“Please go now, Mrs. Bridge,” she said, compressing her lips. “I am on duty here. My mother is very well, thank you.”

Thus this strange couple separated ; and Miss Christopherson stood with one little foot on the stairs, thinking very deeply, long after old Mrs. Bridge had passed through the great oaken gates. It was Mrs. Thurtle who surprised her there.

“Good gracious, Miss Christopherson ! not in the infirmary yet ? I thought that impertinent old woman had left some time ago. Who was she ? what was this about money ? what business had she to come here at unseasonable hours ? Why do these disreputable people”——she was thinking of Uncle Spanswick, who, though he came to see Jenny, always asked for Miss Christopherson——“come in such shoals to you ? I really must insist upon an explanation.”

“I will give you one presently,” said Maud absently, “if I think it necessary.”

“Miss Christopherson !”

The governess looked more attentively at her superior officer.

“Yes, if I think it necessary,” she said, “I will.”

“I do not know whether I am to consider this as an insult or not, but I must inform you, Miss Christopherson, that unless, upon mature reflection, I am perfectly satisfied with your conduct, I shall make this, upon your return from Hastings, the subject of a special report to the committee.”

“I shall have to report myself, Mrs. Thurtle,” said Miss Christopherson ; and with this enigmatical reply the governess went up-stairs, without bestowing another glance upon her principal.

CHAPTER X.

“GOING DOWN FOR A BLOW.”

MISS CHRISTOPHERSON, having in charge that refractory orphan, Jane Spanswick,—who had given much trouble and anxiety to the heads of the establishment by taking to herself one of the most unpleasant of maladies, and by not taking to it kindly after all that had been done for her, but insisting upon particular nurses, special visits from her uncle, and an objection to all the good things which infirmary diet had placed at her disposal,—went away to Hastings on the following Monday afternoon. Miss Christopherson received her five pounds, which she turned over in her hand with an odd smile that Mrs. Thurtle set down as disparaging, and listened to much advice of

a grave sensible kind, delivered at a distance and with due precaution, concerning the right way in which a governess and pupil should conduct themselves when away from the authority to which they were subject. Mrs. Thurtle was frigid and lofty, and so marred the effect of her discourse; she had not forgiven Miss Christopherson her trespasses against her, and a draft in pencil of the report with which she had threatened the governess was in her pocket when she expressed a hope that Miss Christopherson would know how to behave herself away from Camberwell.

Miss Christopherson listened to the lecture patiently, and then said :

“ You will require an account of this money upon my return ? ”

“ No ; it will not be necessary, unless any excess of expenditure occurs.”

“ Jane Spanswick shall not cost the institution more than five pounds,” said Miss Christopherson thoughtfully. “ I think that I can promise that.”

"I have carefully calculated the expense of a quiet mode of living; one room, say at twelve shillings a-week, and humble but not frugal fare."

"Jenny would be all the better for port-wine."

"The fresh invigorating sea is better than all the wine in the world!" cried Mrs. Thurtle with enthusiasm.

"Not to drink, surely?"

Mrs. Thurtle walked away with great rapidity, and Jenny Spanswick, who had been an attentive listener, said,

"Oh my!"

"Why do you say 'Oh my,' Jenny?" asked Miss Christopherson, looking down at her pupil.

"I don't think Mrs. Thurtle liked your saying that."

"I did not intend her to like it, Jane Spanswick," said the governess, with a little frown. "She put me out of temper with her common-places; I am easily put out. Here is the cab, and so we go away, both of us!"

"We shall soon be back again," said Jenny with a sigh.

"I am not quite certain of that," replied Miss Christopherson.

"Not return? Why, what is to hinder us?"

"Inclination, perhaps."

"But—"

"But, Jane Spanswick, the less you trouble me and yourself the better, at present. Have I not told you that I am out of temper?"

"Oh dear, I am sorry; for I have been so pleased at the idea of this holiday with you, Miss Maud. I want you to let me call you 'Miss Maud' till the holiday is up; after that, and for all my life, 'the governess.'"

Miss Christopherson had drawn a letter from her pocket, and as she broke the seal she looked intently, almost sorrowfully, at the speaker.

"It will be 'Miss Christopherson' long before the fourteen days are over, I think," she said. "You are strong now, and two weeks with me will be too much for a child's affection. Besides—"

“Besides—” repeated Jenny, as she paused.

“There, don’t worry me; leave me to come round, Jenny.”

Jane Spanswick was silent for a while, and the dark eyes watched the earnest face of the young woman who had nursed her through her illness. Yes, it was an earnest face; perhaps a face with even a severe expression at times, for all its prettiness and natural refinement. It softened over the letter which she perused, Jenny was certain; the lips wreathed themselves into smiles, the eyes sparkled, and even a musical little laugh rippled forth. And yet it was only an institution letter, Jenny Spanswick was certain; for the great red-and-white embossed seal at the back of the envelope spoke of the City Clerks’ Orphan Asylum, upon which they were both gladly turning their backs.

“There, I am in high spirits now!” cried Miss Christopherson, tearing the letter into very small pieces, which she dropped from the window into the roadway.

“And all through that institution letter?”

“How did you guess?—Oh, the big seal, of course. Yes, Jenny, all through that institution letter.”

She laughed again, as at a pleasant reminiscence connected with it; but detecting an intense curiosity in Jenny Spanswick's gaze, and objecting to further questioning, she turned the conversation by asking her young companion if she had written to her uncle, and told him the news of her departure to Hastings. Yes, Jenny had written. Poor uncle, if he could only come down to Hastings for a day, what a deal of good it would do him!

“I should not be very much surprised to see him,” said Maud Christopherson.

At the railway station, and after the railway porter had wheeled away two small boxes belonging to the travellers, there was a surprise for them. Miss Christopherson was getting out her purse and looking with some hesitation at the third-class passengers who were taking their tickets at the booking-office, and Jenny was standing

by her side, bewildered by the bustle and excitement, when Mr. Marmaduke Spanswick, in a new black billycock-hat, and with his third-class ticket stuck in the band thereof, loomed before them, large, ruddy, and oppressive. Miss Christopherson felt herself colouring with vexation, and Marmaduke's watchful and protuberant eyes noticed this, and took it for a welcome blush of satisfaction at his presence.

"How do you do, Miss Christopherson?—How d'ye do, Jenny?" he said, shaking hands with his cousin first, and then offering his big brimstone-gloved paw so emphatically to the governess that she took it instinctively, and then got away from it as quickly as possible. "Going down to Hastings for a blow, like me? Nothing like a good blow to put the stomach—I should say the system—in order. I have great pleasure in experiencing this happy coincidence."

He made one of his Junction Street bows at this, and Miss Christopherson looked keenly at him, for an instant.

“You knew that we were going to Hastings, Jenny and I?”

“Upon my honour, I had not the slightest idea that I should enjoy the pleasure of your company as a fellow-traveller. Will you allow me to get the tickets? May I be permitted to—”

“I will get my own tickets, thank you.”

“Then I’ll find a comfortable carriage for you. I’ve often managed to get a second-class carriage by tipping the guard a shilling. It’s no loss to them, and it’s convenient to us. Will you come with me, Jenny, or stay with Miss Christopherson?”

“Jenny will stay with me,” said Miss Christopherson.

“Oh, certainly; perhaps it’s best.—You’re not looking so bad, old girl,” he said to Jenny, “after all the fright you’ve given the lot of us.”

He went away in great haste after the comfortable carriage which he had promised to secure for the governess and her charge, and Maud Christopherson went round to another

pigeon-hole in the partition which hemmed-in the booking-clerks, and took two first-class tickets for St. Leonards.

“To Hastings,” said Jenny, who was at her elbow.

“I have altered my mind; I shall get out at the last station but one,” she said, and then they went slowly towards the railway platform. When they were merged in the crowd of human life about them; when the passengers were jostling each other, and bells were ringing, and guards were clipping little pieces out of tickets, and the doors of the train were being banged-to and opened decisively and banged-to again, and there were only two minutes and a half left before the time of starting,—the governess pressed Jenny’s hand, which was in her own, so suddenly, that the girl looked up and said, as though her name had been mentioned:

“Yes, Miss Maud.”

“Your cousin does not often take a holiday from Junction Street in February, does he?”

"I don't know. I never heard of his taking a holiday before."

"He is going down for a blow, he says."

"He does not seem to want it much."

"You will understand, Jane Spanswick," she said sharply, so sharply that Jenny's eyes distended themselves and then filled suddenly with tears, "that your cousin's presence in Hastings is nothing to us, and that the less we see of him the better."

"Very well, Miss Maud. I am sure I don't want to see him very often."

The object of these remarks came dashing towards them in rather an excited manner.

"Make haste, my dear madam!—Do look sharp, Jenny!—I couldn't work the second-class, but I have got my portmanteau on a seat with the back to the engine, and we shall go down famously. Here, I say!—Hi, Miss Christopherson!" he shouted after her, "that's first class, you know!"

But the guard had opened the door at her request, and was inspecting the tickets she had

in her hand. Even then Mr. Marmaduke Spanswick could not believe his eyes for an instant.

“I say, it’s first class!” he said in the governess’s ear again.

“I always travel first class,” said Miss Christopherson distantly.

“Well, but—but how do you manage it?” he was almost on the point of inquiring, when the guard shouted out a peremptory “Take your seats!” someone called “all right!” and he knew that he had not a moment to spare if he was anxious concerning that blow which was good for his stomach.

“I don’t make this out,” he muttered; and then he wrenched at the handle of the door of his third-class compartment, and was just in time to save his train.

Meanwhile Miss Christopherson and Jenny had entered the first-class compartment, where only one passenger was sitting, diligently employed in cutting the leaves of a periodical which lay upon his knees. He was a fair-haired,

long-whiskered man, tall, slim, young, and good-looking; and as Miss Christopherson entered the carriage she knew that in evading Marmaduke Spanswick's obtrusiveness she had stepped from the frying-pan into the fire.

There was no effort to withdraw again, however; she felt that it was too late, and that the meeting with him—with that man above all men in the world!—must take place once more, as she had hoped it never would. As the shrill whistle sounded, and the guards, porters, friends of passengers, and newspaper boys seemed to glide away, and to leave the train upon a wilderness of housetops, the man looked up and recognised the governess of the City Clerks' Orphanage.

“Maud!” he cried; and then in a tone which was quickly restrained he said, “Miss Lawson!” correcting himself an instant afterwards, and for the third time, by addressing her by the name which is most familiar to ourselves: “Miss Christopherson,” he said, “it is you! You are going down to them, then? I am very glad—

I am indeed very, very glad to know this, and to see you."

She did not respond to his expression of gladness, but caught quickly,—she seemed ever a quick woman—at two words of his address that had alarmed her.

"To *them*!" she repeated. "They are at Hastings, then, my lord?"

"Yes; I am going down to see them now."

"I am not," was the reply.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BEGINNING OF THE HOLIDAY.

AFTER the brief dialogue which we have given in our last chapter, there was a long silence between Maud Christopherson and the gentleman who sat on the opposite side of the carriage facing Jenny Spanswick. Neither seemed disposed for a while to continue the conversation. The governess of the City Clerks' Orphan Asylum studied the house-tops with grave intentness; and the tall, fair-whiskered man, after looking askance at her, and from her to Jenny Spanswick, who certainly bewildered him, cut slowly at the leaves of the periodical until the task which he had set himself was completed, when he resumed his furtive glances. It was evident that Jenny Spanswick was far

more of a riddle to him than Maud Christopher-son, and the City Clerks' orphan began to feel uncomfortable at his curious attention. When she looked up, she generally encountered a pair of blue eyes—not the blue of the sky, but the “sky blue” of the milkman—directed towards her with a strange expression ; and though they were immediately dropped upon encountering her own, or fixed as if in perfect unconsciousness upon something immediately above her head, they returned to their object of interest when Jenny looked away again.

Meanwhile the train proceeded ; the broad expanse of house-roofs, chimney-pots, and factory shafts gave place to thin lines of houses standing on scrubby patches of waste land where boys were playing ; the thin lines of houses and the waste land gave way to trees and fields, and then to lines of houses again, and of houses half-built, at which a colony of labourers was busy ; finally, to more trees and fields without a break in them, and the great city lying in its own smoke at a respectful distance from the

travellers. When the train was fairly on its way, the gentleman took all the breath from Jenny by suddenly addressing her.

“Would you like to see the pictures?” he said, handing her the periodical; “I think they’ll amuse you.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Jenny, very humbly and politely, and her little gray-worsted gloves were stretched forth to take the paper. But she was more interested in Miss Christopherson’s friend than in the illustrated periodical which had been placed at her disposal. The gentleman amused her without doubt, for he was from a world of which she had only read in books, and he was a friend of the lady who had been kind to her when all the rest of them at Camberwell had shrunk away. Miss Christopherson had called him “my lord,” and she wondered if all lords were like him, and had such fair whiskers, such insipid blue eyes, and such long thin legs that Jenny thought if he were feathered he would be very like a bird. She wondered also how it was that the governess

knew a real live lord, and how long he had known the governess to warrant him in calling her—as he had done in the first instance—by her Christian name. She began to render him uncomfortable in his turn by her rigid scrutiny, which was particularly unpleasant to him now that he had given up the study of her. Those round black eyes suddenly peering at him over the newspaper almost rendered him nervous. Why did that odd, old-fashioned, half-shabbily dressed child with whom Maud Christopherson was in company, stare at him thus pertinaciously, he wondered. He called her to a sense of politeness at last by saying,

“They’re not bad pictures, are they?”

Jenny turned very red, but she answered quite truthfully,

“I have not been looking at them, sir.”

The gentleman was aware of that fact for himself; and when Jenny had begun to assume an interest in the wood-engravings, he changed his place suddenly, and faced the governess.

"I am afraid that you are annoyed at this meeting, Miss Christopherson," he said in a low voice, quite inaudible to Jenny Spanswick, and much to her inward dissatisfaction, "and I should be sorry to distress you unnecessarily. You know that—you should know that at least," he added, half reproachfully.

"Yes, I know that," she answered.

"And I have not offended you?" he said, quite earnestly.

"In no way whatever am I offended with anyone," she answered, in a voice as low as his own, and again to the disappointment of Miss Spanswick; "I have outlived my sense—say my morbid sense if you will—of injury."

"Then——"

"Then why do I hold myself aloof from them?" she asked for herself, seeing that he hesitated for an instant to proceed with his question. "Because my nature does not assimilate with theirs, and I would leave them that peace which my presence, my ill-temper and pride, will not allow them to enjoy. I might

have explained all this in three words, my lord—‘We don’t agree.’”

“You will allow me to tell them that I have met you?”

“I would rather that you did not,” said Miss Christopherson; “a little disturbs my mother, and excites her husband. They are not anxious about me;” here she could not resist a momentary scornful expression passing across her face; “if they had me at home to-morrow, the old mistakes, misconstructions, and quarrels would arise.”

“I am not sure of that—I hope——”

“The question is not worth discussing,” said Miss Christopherson quietly; “it is better for us all that I remain my own mistress—it is infinitely better for myself, and you have heard what a selfish woman I am.”

“I have not heard,” he said more warmly; “had such an assertion reached my ears, I would have emphatically denied it.”

“Thank you for your championship,” she replied bitterly; “I am afraid you would have

waged war in vain against the arguments which Mr. Lawson would have brought to bear on his side of the question. What a beautiful day for February, is it not?"

"A very beautiful day indeed," he said; "bright, if cold."

"Somewhat cold, perhaps."

There was another long pause; Miss Christopherson again studied the landscape attentively, and the nobleman thought that he would pay Miss Spanswick a glance meanwhile. Yes, it was just as he had imagined; the dark eyes of the girl were peering above the top of the paper still, and he was sure that her ears were pricked up like a cat's.

"You have been abroad I suppose, Miss Christopherson?" he said at last.

"No, I have remained in England," she said; "and have been endeavouring to make myself useful to society—with very little success."

"Useful—oh! indeed!" he said, somewhat doubtfully; "and that child in the corner is—is——"

"Is a friend of mine, Lord Evesby," Miss Christopherson explained; "she has been ill of small-pox, and is going down with me to Hastings for change of air."

"Small-pox!" repeated Lord Evesby, after a little start; "ah! a disagreeable complaint! Is it—is it quite safe to have her in the carriage with you?"

"Yes, quite safe for *me*," she replied, with a slight emphasis.

"I was only thinking of you," he said; "when I was a boy I had all the ailments under the sun, and catching anything fresh is a sheer impossibility on my part. You must not attempt to frighten me away, Miss Maud; I shall not make my escape at the next station."

He said it laughingly, looking a handsome man as he laughed; and Miss Christopherson even condescended to smile a little before she addressed him suddenly and irrelevantly.

"Mrs. Lawson is well?" she asked.

"Yes, she is well, I believe."

“Quite well, and happy?”

“Quite well, and happy, I should say,” he said. “I do not visit at your step-father’s house so frequently as I used in the old days. I have not seen them for six months.”

“Ah! the old days!” murmured Miss Christopherson; and as she turned her sad young face towards the glass again, Lord Evesby noticed that her lip quivered for an instant. He did not look a wise man—we are sure that in many things this young nobleman was far from wise—but he was quick in this instance to seize upon an opportunity which he believed had presented itself.

“The old days, when I saw you very often, and from which I date so much of joy; the old days, which a word of yours can restore so thoroughly to all of us.”

Low as his voice was, there was pathos, probably truth, in its tones; but Miss Christopherson was not affected by it. Her face assumed an expression almost stern, and if the colour faded from it for an instant, there was no em-

barrassment or reciprocity of sentiment in her reply.

“The old days never come back to one who has lost as much faith in them as I have.”

“Is it not possible to restore that faith; to prove that you judged hastily and acted rashly, despite that sense of injury of which you have already spoken?”

“I said that I had outlived all sense of injury,” said Maud Christopherson. “I have done it as completely as I have outlived all the false sentiment which was natural to a girl of seventeen.”

“But——”

“But Lord Evesby is too much of a gentleman to distress me by pursuing this subject, I am sure.”

“I am silent,” he replied.

This was all the conversation that ensued between these two friends of a past time, of which we know so little, until Hayward's Heath was reached. Jenny Spanswick had not heard a word of the dialogue, but, being a curious girl, had wondered very much what it was all about,

and why they had dropped their voices to so low a key. She formed her own conclusions on the subject, being a quick girl, but she sat very demure and quiet in her corner of the carriage, glancing out of the window a great deal, and at the wood-engravings of the illustrated newspaper a little. When Lord Evesby had relapsed into silence, and was sitting with his arms folded on his chest in a thoughtful pose, Maud Christopherson changed her seat to the side of Jenny Spanswick, and asked her *protégée* if she were tired with the journey.

“Not at all, thank you,” answered Jenny, briskly.

“That is well. You are stronger than I fancied you were.”

After which assertion Miss Christopherson became thoughtful herself, and Jenny considered that, taking it altogether, it was a very dull journey to the sea.

At Hayward's Heath the train stopped, and the instant afterwards the door was wrenched open, and the big form of Mr. Marmaduke

Spanswick stood on the step blocking up the aperture.

“Well, who would have thought of you and Jenny coming out like this!” he said. “I made sure it was third class; for everybody of a careful turn travels third class now-a-days. I never was more surprised in my life than when I saw you turn in here, upon my word! They’re not a bad sort at Camberwell, if they let you do the grand in this style, Miss Christopherson. How are you getting on? Can I fetch you anything in the way of refreshments? How’s Jenny?”

“We are getting on very well, thank you,” said Miss Christopherson, without looking in his direction.

“And you won’t take anything at present?”

“Not at present.”

“All right; I shall find you at Hastings Station, and I will see after the luggage for you,” said Mr. Spanswick, eyeing Lord Evesby as he spoke; “it will save you trouble and expense. Porters are always looking after sixpences, confound them! Always happy to be

of service to the ladies—especially when the ladies are young and pretty, you know, Miss Christopherson.”

Lord Evesby had listened with an astonishment which he was incapable of disguising to this friendly salutation on the part of Marmaduke Spanswick towards the governess; it was beyond all comprehension; and the mystery in which it had pleased the eccentric and obstinate girl to enshroud herself appeared to become denser than before. He could not understand how a girl of Maud’s refinement—strange though she was in many things—could have made the acquaintance of so vulgar a specimen of humanity. That she had made it was evident, and that she was annoyed by the man’s officiousness was palpable to him also by that contraction of the white forehead which he perfectly remembered. Had he not studied her temper—especially her ill-temper—in the old days to which he had alluded at an earlier period of their journey? He thought it was time for him to interfere.

"I am afraid, Miss Christopherson, that you feel the draught here," he said.

"A little, perhaps—not much."

"Will you oblige us by shutting the door, my good man?" he said, turning to Marmaduke, and addressing him in that thick, slow utterance which makes at times a great impression on the irrepressible cad.

It made a great impression on Marmaduke, who had had an eye on his lordship from the first moment of opening the carriage-door. He fell off the step, and nearly went under the train in his astonishment; then he recovered himself, and with the door ajar, made the most of his opportunity for a minute and a half.

"Certainly, my lord—I beg pardon, my lord. I had not the slightest idea, my lord, that you were suffering from the draught, or that my friend here felt the draught in any way. Glad to see your lordship looking so well."

"I do not think I have the pleasure of your acquaintance," said Lord Evesby, very dis-

tantly—quite five miles off the gentleman, at least.

“No—no. I don’t aspire to the honour, my lord—of course not; you’re not in my line at all,” said Mr. Spanswick, backing, and absolutely blushing; “but I know your lordship’s face well enough. When I go down to the races, and do a modest sov. on the favourite, I see your lordship in the ring, and it is a pleasure to see the real downright sporting-gentleman. Good-morning, my lord.”

Marmaduke Spanswick shut the door of the carriage, and went back to his own compartment, where he sat and thought so desperately, that a baby in the arms of its mother opposite shrieked with terror at his stony glare.

“I’m hanged if I can make this out,” he said at last; after which summing-up of his position, he hoped no lady or gentleman had any objection to smoking, especially no lady—there were no smoking-carriages in those days—and took consolation from his meerschaum-pipe for the remainder of the journey.

Meanwhile Lord Evesby was as much puzzled as Marmaduke Spanswick, though he did not express himself as forcibly.

"You know that gentleman?" he said to Maud Christopherson, with an elevation of his eyebrows so expressive of his surprise that the governess resented it.

"Yes, Lord Evesby—very well."

"Not a friend of yours. I saw by your face that he was not a friend."

"He is the first cousin of my friend here," said Maud; "very respectable in his way, and has a capital business in Junction Street, Spitalfields."

"Great heaven!" ejaculated Lord Evesby.

"A man who is making money, though he only wagers, as you have just heard, his modest sov. on the favourite. I have seen his shop crowded on a Saturday evening."

"Surely you don't visit Spitalfields very frequently, Miss Christopherson?" he asked almost satirically.

"When I please—when it suits my conveni-

ence," said Maud sharply, and the heightened colour spread itself for an instant over her face.

He saw the change, and took his cue from it.

"I beg your pardon," he said humbly; "I ask ten thousand pardons. I had no right to put such questions to you. I had forgotten."

"Forgotten how hasty I was—how a word would always put me into one of my 'tempers,'" she answered.

"No. Forgotten what was due to you as a lady, and to myself as a gentleman," he said frankly. "Will you accept my apology?"

"Certainly."

"You have a right to choose your own friends—you said that long ago; and if I am not of the number now, I regret it deeply."

"You should congratulate yourself," said Maud Christopherson.

"And if that gentleman—"

"Well, he is no friend of mine," said Maud very quietly now. "I have no friends. I like

enemies best; and I make them wherever I go."

"You have not forgiven me, I see."

"Yes, I have," said Maud, "if there were anything to forgive. It is Jenny Spanswick here who should speak up for her family."

"Oh, I don't mind, Miss Maud," said Jenny; "I don't suppose Lord Evesby would care much for Marmaduke. I don't care a great deal for him myself, though I try hard sometimes, because he's good to uncle."

Lord Evesby was startled by the quickness with which Jenny Spanswick had caught up his name, but he did not comment upon it. He folded his arms again, pulled one of his long fair whiskers caressingly, and tried—as Marmaduke was trying in a humbler department of the train—to master the position.

At St. Leonards, Miss Christopherson and Jenny Spanswick prepared to alight, and Lord Evesby assisted them from the carriage.

"We shall meet, I suppose— I hope," he said almost earnestly.

Miss Christopherson shook her head.

“I think that it is very unlikely.”

“And if we meet?”

“Oh, leave me to myself, please,” she answered.

“And the Lawsons—your mother?”

“Unless you betray my confidence, they will not think of me,” she said coldly.

And then Lord Evesby stepped back to the carriage, and Miss Christopherson gave directions to the guard to get her two small boxes from the luggage-van. The train moved on a few minutes afterwards, and as one of the third-class compartments glided past, the head of Marmaduke Spanswick was seen at the window, vacant and stony still.

“It’s—it’s the wrong station for you!” Marmaduke shouted forth; and then, seeing that Miss Christopherson was giving directions about her luggage, he relinquished the riddle in despair, and once again swore at its incomprehensibility.

CHAPTER XII.

WATCHED.

“ **W**HERE are we going to look for lodgings, Miss Maud ?” asked Jenny.

“ We have them already,” said the governess; “ I answered an advertisement, and engaged them two days ago.”

“ Shall I call a fly for you, ma’am ?” asked the porter.

“ If you please.”

A fly was procured, and Miss Christopherson, her orphan child, and her boxes, were driven to Warrior Square.

“ Not one of these grand houses ?” gasped forth Jenny, as the fly stopped at the address which Miss Christopherson had given ; “ not one of these ?”

“For a fortnight—why not, Jenny?” said the governess. “I have been saving up my money lately, and I was determined that they should not put you and me into a back street. I was not used to back streets before I came to the Asylum.”

“Ah, you were a lady once,” said Jenny; “I see that now. For you know real lords—and you were never like the rest of them at the Institution. Oh! I am sorry that you ever got poor!”

“Yes, I am poor enough,” replied the governess sadly.

“What a pity! is it not?”

“I am not quite certain,” said Miss Christopherson.

They entered the house, and were ushered into a drawing room on the first floor, a well-furnished room for a lodging-house, boasting a piano and a suite of furniture that was not of shiny leather.

“You will find your room next to mine, and mine adjoining the drawing room, Jenny,” said

Miss Christopherson ; “ring for anything that you require, as if the place belonged to you. I want to see how you can play the lady for a fortnight.”

“ I am afraid that I cannot play that part at all,” said Jenny, laughing.

“ Try, to oblige me.”

Jenny promised that she would try, and went to her room a little puzzled with Miss Christopherson herself. The governess was an odd girl, certainly—odd, and extravagant, and cross at times ; but Jenny Spanswick loved her all the better for her eccentricities.

They had a humble six-o'clock tea, having dined at the City Clerks' Orphan Asylum before starting on their journey ; and then the night was upon them before they were aware in those early days of the new year. Miss Christopherson was not quite herself that night, Jenny was certain. She was very thoughtful, although she made many efforts to talk to Jenny, to tell her of the walks and drives about the place, and of the great sea which was restless that night, and

broke in thunderous masses upon the beach a short distance beyond the square. But she fell fathoms deep from her at last, giving up her attempt to talk commonplaces, and forgetting Jenny Spanswick as completely as though she had never lived—as though she had never been born to influence her life for so much that was strange, and for so much that was to last to the end.

Jenny Spanswick did not seek to interrupt her, but went softly to the couch at the back of the room, curled up her feet thereon, and endeavoured to take interest in the illustrated periodical which she had brought to the lodgings, without a thought as to its rightful possessor. She read several paragraphs attentively, examined all the prints, and glanced frequently, at the governess, sitting there so still and grave, with one hand on her temples pushing back her mass of brown hair, and the other tracing purposeless hieroglyphics on the table-cover, or following its pattern unconsciously, as she dreamed on. A fair picture, in the light of

the lamp which the servant had brought in an hour ago,—a something which touched the heart of the young girl watching her with a stronger and deeper interest than she had hitherto known, and assured her that there was much of sorrow at the other heart with which hers beat in unison.

Jenny went off to sleep watching her. She made one or two ineffectual efforts to keep her eyes open; but the room grew misty, and the governess disappeared for several minutes at a time, and then was found again, still working out her problem from the pattern of the table-cover, and finally became confused with the great oil-lamp, the looking-glass upon the mantelpiece, the fire fast dying out from inattention, and the piano in the corner of the room. All faded into a blank, and Jenny Spanswick slept comfortably, with her chin on her chest, and Lord Evesby's newspaper crumpled together in her hands. How long Jenny had slept thus she was never aware; hours had passed, for she had dreamt a great deal in the interim; she had

done the journey from the noisy London station to St. Leonards again ; had had her school-lessons heard by Lord Evesby, with her cousin Marmaduke grinning at her through the window of the carriage, and the governess trying to scratch him down the face ; had reached her lodgings where the landlady was having in the coals, and wanted Lord Evesby and Marmaduke and herself to assist in carrying them before the rain came on, and where the coals were continually being shot down the area by everybody but herself, who was pronounced too weak to carry the big black sacks, which Lord Evesby and Marmaduke found very easy work. Suddenly she awoke with a start, and discovered that she was close to the edge of the sofa, with her head hanging over the side, and half the blood in her body in it. She sat up, and saw that the lamp was burning low, the fire out, the room full of shadow, and devoid of everything living and breathing therein save herself. The coals were still being delivered below with punctuality and despatch, she thought, until she

remembered where she was, and how she had listened to the thud of the waves, and the heavy drag-drag of the pebbles on the beach, before she had fallen off to sleep.

Jenny Spanswick sat heaped upon the sofa, collecting her ideas, for a while; then she put her feet to the floor, and found that they had not awakened as quickly as herself, but were full of "pins-and-needles;" and whilst raising herself gently, and trying if it were possible to walk, a strange and heavy sob startled her.

"Miss Maud is ill," was her first thought, and she was on her feet in an instant, making towards the French window, which her quick eyes had seen was open, and through which the sound had seemed to issue. She drew back a heavy red curtain, and stole out upon the balcony, where she believed that she should find the governess, and where she found her, as she thought she should.

It was a bright night, though the sky was flecked with many white masses of cloud, from which the moon had lately stolen. All was very

still. The square was empty and dark, and the gas was burning dimly in it. The carriage-road and the parade were free from visitors; and only the sea beyond them was tossing and heaving with its own excitement. Miss Christopherson was standing on the balcony looking out to sea, when Jenny Spanswick touched her arm.

“Are you not well, Miss Maud?”

The governess started at her intruder, and Jenny Spanswick saw that she had been crying, and that the tears were still wet upon her cheeks.

“Yes, yes, Jenny, I am well enough,” she said hurriedly; “go in, child. The night air is too keen for you.”

“And for you, I fancy.”

“Don’t you think that I am strong?” she asked, with a forced little laugh. “Why, if my nerves had not been of iron, I should have broken up long ago.”

“I wonder what it is that makes you so unhappy, Miss Maud,” said Jenny Spanswick,

creeping closely to her; "for this is not the first time that I have seen you crying, although you are so very firm."

"When did you see me before?" she asked sharply.

"In the night,—once or twice, I think twice,—when you were my dear nurse at the infirmary."

"Fancy, child, fancy," said Maud Christopher-son; but she drew Jenny Spanswick to her, and put part of the shawl which she was wearing round the girl's shoulders for protection sake. "I am a very strong-minded young woman, everybody says, and you must have dreamed of my tears, Jenny."

"Have I dreamed of these?" asked Jenny Spanswick.

"No; these are realities, born of a spasm of regret at being too much alone in the world. Nothing more, upon my word."

"If I live to grow up, to get strong, and well, and rich, you shall never be alone," said Jenny.

“What a promise!” cried Miss Christopher-son, so scornfully, that Jenny almost retreated from the shawl.

“Oh! you don’t believe me. You don’t think that a child like me can ever live to be grateful; but she can—she will!”

“You are talking nonsense, Jenny; and you will find out what nonsense it is some day, when you look back upon this night. You know with what a bad temper I am afflicted, and how it sets everybody against me, everybody in all the world, because I cannot fawn, or flatter, or submit. And I like everybody against me; it suits me. I’m not miserable.”

She was excited, and the arm which had been passed lightly round Jenny’s neck to keep the shawl there, tightened suddenly, and nearly garotted her listener.

“I know what has made you fret to-night,” said Jenny, when the arm had relaxed its pressure, and she could find her voice.

“Clever girl, what?”

“The sight of him.”

“Of whom, Jenny?” asked Maud, carelessly—“of your cousin Marmaduke?”

“Oh! no; of Lord Evesby, who was, perhaps—at least, I think——”

“Go on. I like the truth, Jenny—I don’t find much of it about; but I like it, for all that.”

“Who was a sweetheart of yours once, then; wasn’t he?”

Maud Christopherson was silent for a moment, then she said, very lightly,

“Almost a sweetheart, as you call it, Jenny—not quite.”

“And you quarrelled?”

“No, I frightened him away,” she said, drawing her towards the room; “and there is all the story. And now, do not speak of this again; it was a great liberty, but, you see, I have not flown into a passion, and resented it, as I ought to have done—as I shall do on another occasion, if you are not less inquisitive. And I was not crying about Lord Evesby, my lost doll, Jenny,” she said, when they were in

the room again ; “ but at the sight of the great sea, and the calm night, and the stillness over all, which reminded me of a home that I had once, and of a father who lived in it.”

“ And your father loved you very much ?”

“ Yes ; but I was a child then,” said Maud bitterly. “ Good night, Jenny ; it is time you were in bed. We are past regulation hours.”

“ Good night, Miss Maud.”

Jenny Spanswick went away to her room, and the governess, after a moment's hesitation, returned to the balcony, where her small friend had surprised her. There was peace without there in the cold night, and she was feverish, and had not thought out to the end all the studies on which Jenny had intruded. She wanted rest, perfect stillness, time to reflect upon the past ; time to realize her position in the future, with these figures marching once more to the front, and threatening all the past misconceptions, which had made her what she was. She did not give way again ; standing in the shadow of the balcony looking out to sea, those

reminiscences which had touched her heart were far enough from her when she took up that old firm look, which told of a will difficult to influence, perhaps impossible to subdue.

And again on that night her thoughts were destined to be intruded upon, and a fresh subject for contemplation to arise. She had not remained there five minutes, when some one came along the parade, crossed the road, and stood against the lamp-post looking down the square, and towards that row of houses of which her own house formed a part. She was sure that the figure was of some one whom she knew—closely resembling that of the wild-looking, hairy-faced man, who had called himself Uncle Spanswick. He was smoking a short pipe, and was buttoned to the throat in a long greatcoat, with the collar turned up about his ears ; but she was sure it was he. He waited there, unconscious of the watcher on the balcony, until he was joined by a tall stout man, who was also smoking, and the sparks of whose pipe made a trail of fire across the night, as he

came up. They stood together for a few moments ; Mr. Marmaduke Spanswick—for it was that gentleman, Maud Christopherson was assured—pointed with his stick towards the house from the balcony of which she was an unwilling watcher of their movements ; and the figure of the elder man nodded his head once or twice to the directions of the other.

They did not enter the square, but walked away together, as if they had become suddenly aware of her figure in the shadow of the balcony, or as if there were no further occasion to be abroad that night.

“ Watched,” said Miss Christopherson to herself ; and thinking of the Spanswicks’ presence in Hastings, she went back to the drawing-room, and forgot her own affairs in considering the advent of Jenny’s relations upon the scene of action.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. LAWSON SPEAKS UP FOR HIS STEP-DAUGHTER.

MISS CHRISTOPHERSON and her charge, Jenny Spanswick, were up early the following morning. The City Clerks' female orphan had been surprised by the governess's appearance at her bedside as a clock in the house was striking six ; and she thought once that Miss Christopherson looked a trifle firmer and harder than she had seen her in the busiest days at the Asylum, when the weather was hot, and the children were "trying."

"Get up, Jenny," she said quickly ; "we must not waste time in the country. The morning will be fine and bright, and we will have an early breakfast, and go for a long day's drive away from here."

“Away from here!” said Jenny, wondering a little.

“Yes; into the country. It will be cold by the sea.”

“You are not afraid of meeting——”

“I do not know of what I am afraid, at present,” said Miss Christopherson, interrupting her; “but I do not care to be taken off my guard. Get up, please; we shall leave here at half-past seven.”

Jenny asked no more questions; and Miss Christopherson left the room, and began to ring the drawing-room bell with calm persistency, until the breakfast was on the table.

The landlady, somewhat red in the face with suppressed excitement, appeared with the servant and the breakfast-tray.

“I thought that you would be tired with your journey yesterday, madam,” she said politely, “and would not be quite punctual to the early hour you mentioned last night.”

“I am always punctual, be pleased to understand,” said Miss Christopherson, with severity.

"When I mentioned a quarter to seven, I did not mean a quarter past," she added, glancing at the timepiece on the mantelshelf.

"It shall not occur again."

"Thank you. Have you ordered a carriage and a pair of horses for me at half-past seven?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I shall not dine at home to-day," said Maud, "and I am never at home to anyone or under any circumstances. You will probably have visitors inquiring for me; tell them that I have driven out and have not mentioned an hour at which I shall return. Tell them also that which I have told you."

"Never at home under any circumstances—dear me!—yes, ma'am."

"That will do."

The landlady departed, and when her servant came downstairs after her, she expressed it as her belief that her new lodger was queer. Miss Christopherson had written to her from "The Asylum, Camberwell,"—good gracious! perhaps it was a lunatic asylum—when she had an-

swered her advertisement about her drawing-room floor last week, and had told her of a young friend who had had the smallpox Christmas last, and who, being still weak, had been recommended change of air. The landlady had responded, and mentioned her terms, which had been accepted at once with a frankness that had made her regret ever since not having asked another guinea. But lodgings were plentiful and lodgers were scarce that February; and had the young lady not been insane, or addicted to such early rising, Mrs. Green would have considered that she had not done badly with her drawing-room floor for a fortnight. But she was in doubt when Miss Christopherson and that plainly-dressed child, her companion, were driven away at the unnatural hour of half-past seven into the country; and the numerous inquiries for Miss Christopherson during the day from all kinds of visitors set in a little after nine o'clock, and kept the knocker and the bell continually on the move. The Visitors' List—a fashionable hue-and-cry paper, which Miss

Christopherson had not taken into her calculations—had been published that morning, and all Hastings appeared to be startled by the information, which Mrs. Green, with a proper regard for advertising her establishment, had imparted to the publishers, that Miss Christopherson and friend had arrived at No. 243 Warrior Square.

The first arrival was a portly man with a broad chest, and the largest gold chain that Mrs. Green's servant had ever seen in her life, running all over his waistcoat. He asked for Miss Christopherson with a smirk and a bow, which impressed the maid considerably, and hearing that Miss Christopherson was not at home, he trusted that he could speak to Miss Spanswick for a few minutes. Being informed that Miss Spanswick was also out, he inquired for the landlady, and was shown into a back parlour, where Mrs. Green, better versed in humanity, thought that the gentleman, as she said afterwards, was not of much account.

“I beg pardon,” said Marmaduke, “but I am

anxious to pay my respects to Miss Christopherson—quite an old friend, I may say—and not at home, I am informed.”

“Miss Christopherson has been out since half-past seven.”

“With your permission, madam, I will wait for her return, then.”

“She has gone out with Miss Spanswick, and will not be back till late. She’s not at home, sir, under any circumstances to anybody, she left me word to say,” said Mrs. Green, with great decision.

“Oh! she’ll be at home to me,” said Marmaduke, with an easy confidence that took Mrs. Green aback. “I’m Miss Spanswick’s cousin—one of the family, you must know. She’ll be back to lunch, or dinner, or tea, or something, I suppose?”

“I can’t say, sir. If you leave your card, I’ll put it in the basket in the drawing-room, and Miss Christopherson will see it when she returns from her drive.”

“Oh! she has gone for a drive, then?”

“Yes. She left in a carriage and pair, at half-past seven.”

Mr. Spanswick junior whistled to himself, passed his hand over his forehead, and wished the landlady good morning. He did not leave his card as requested; and when he was out of the house he stood with his hat on the back of his head, looking at the square before him for a while.

“It’s a rum start,” he said; “blessed if I make it out yet! I wonder what her game *is*?”

At half-past ten o’clock another visitor to Miss Christopherson called at Mrs. Green’s. A tall thin gentleman this time, with long legs and fair whiskers; rather a good-looking gentleman, Mrs. Green considered. He only asked for Miss Christopherson, and appeared to be taken as much aback as Mr. Marmaduke Spanswick at the message which was delivered to him.

“Never at home under any circumstances,” he repeated, colouring. “I am sorry that she has left you those instructions to convey to me. Good morning.”

He placed his card on the table, and, with one glance, Mrs. Green saw that a real lord had called, and was impressed accordingly.

"I am sorry, my lord," she began, when he suddenly sat down, and in a manner somewhat excited asked for pen, ink, and paper.

"I will write her a few lines," he said.

Mrs. Green placed her desk at his disposal, and Lord Evesby, with a hand that trembled a little, dashed off the following:—

"DEAR MISS CHRISTOPHERSON,—Your step-father and your mother saw the announcement of your arrival in the Visitors' List this morning. You will not think that I have betrayed your secret. They will call; receive them as a daughter, if you can, for your mother's sake and your own.

"Yours sincerely, EVESBY."

Lord Evesby folded and sealed this epistle, thanked Mrs. Green, and departed.

"Well, to think that Miss Christopherson knows a lord!" said Mrs. Green. She was sit-

ting in the back drawing-room, reflecting upon this, when a third visitor arrived for Miss Christopherson. He did not insist upon seeing the landlady, after the fashion of the two gentlemen who had preceded him; but asked many questions of the servant, and subjected her to a searching cross-examination until she shut the door in his face; for he was a man whom no well-regulated servant's mind could possibly put up with.

"A shabby man, with whity-brown whiskers growing all manner of ways, mum, and, oh lor! such a hat! He wanted to wait for Miss Christopherson or for Miss Spanswick," the servant continued, "and said he did not mind how long he waited, and was I sure that the ladies had not taken their boxes with them and gone off for good; and as he went away, I'm as certain as I'm a standing here, that the man had not a sole to his boots."

"This is extremely odd," said Mrs. Green, as fairly perplexed as Marmaduke Spanswick, but arriving more rapidly at a solution; "it must

have something to do with the lunatic business. All kinds of people go mad, and must be put somewhere. She has advertised my place, and come down here for patients."

Before Mrs. Green sat down to her early dinner, a fourth gentleman had asked to see Miss Christopherson, and then to see her. He was shown into the room, a man of the middle height, dark-haired, heavy-browed, very upright, with a stiff black stock holding him by the throat like a vice, but bringing no blood into a face that might have been better looking had it been several degrees less ghastly.

He jerked his head slightly towards Mrs. Green, and then asked at what hour Miss Christopherson and friend were expected home.

"Miss Christopherson did not mention any hour in particular," said the landlady.

"You are sure she is *not* at home?" he asked.

"Quite sure," said Mrs. Green indignantly.

"And she has not mentioned any hour at which she is likely to return?"

“No, sir.”

He frowned at Mrs. Green, as though she were a secret agent in a plot against him, laid his card upon the table, and walked in a stately manner from the house, after informing the landlady that he should call again in the course of the afternoon.

“I’m sure he has a patient for Miss Christopherson,” said Mrs. Green, after he had gone. “Oh, dear! this is getting very dreadful.”

Mr. Lawson, for that was the gentleman’s name, called again in the afternoon, and once in the dusk of the evening, when he found a shabbily-dressed man upon the door-step, arguing with the maid-servant.

“I tell you that they ain’t come back yet; and if you’ve a message for them, that you’d better leave it, than be a continually knocking here,” said the domestic, now irate and agitated.

The man withdrew, but left no message; and Mr. Lawson looked after him for a moment or two.

“Has that person called for Miss Christopher-son?” he asked of the servant.

“Yes, sir ; everybody keeps a-calling, and she ain’t come back yet, and——”

“I will wait for her,” said Mr. Lawson, snapping his teeth together unpleasantly. “Be good enough to show me into her sitting-room.”

“Yes, sir.”

The servant complied with his request, and then informed Mrs. Green of Mr. Lawson’s determination. Mrs. Green went upstairs, and found Mr. Lawson firmly planted on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire, and his eyes fixed upon the letter and card that had been left for his step-daughter.

“Lord Evesby has called?” said Mr. Lawson, pointing towards the note which lay upon the table.

“Yes, sir.”

“Did he write that note here?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Thank you. I shall not require your atten-

dance, Mrs. Green. I have made up my mind to remain here until Miss Christopherson returns."

"But——"

"It is a duty which devolves upon me," he condescended to explain; "I am Miss Christopherson's father."

"God bless me!" said Mrs. Green.

She did not attempt to continue the conversation, but retired with haste from the first-floor drawing-room. She was right in her surmise, then; Miss Christopherson was the keeper of a lunatic asylum, and had come to Hastings with the object of taking a few patients back with her to Camberwell. And this was one of them, a man of not more than two-and-thirty years of age, who said he was the father of a young woman of twenty. It was all very unpleasant, and the sooner Miss Christopherson departed the better, if the house was to be filled with raging-mad people. Her own servant, who had been sorely tried that day, had actually talked of giving warning, if Miss Christopher-

son's friends kept worrying her like this, and—
Yes, there was another knock and ring, as she
was a born woman !

“ Is Miss Christopherson in ? ”

“ No, she isn't, ma'am. She left word that
she was never to be in. She's out for the day ;
she'll be always out, she says,” replied the ser-
vant very quickly now.

“ Where is your mistress ? ” asked the new-
comer peremptorily, but with a voice that Mrs.
Green was assured trembled with indignation.
“ I wish to speak to her, if you please.”

“ What name ? ”

“ Mrs. Thurtle. There is my card.”

Mrs. Green and Mrs. Thurtle stood face to
face a few minutes afterwards in the back
drawing-room. Mrs. Thurtle began at once.

“ Is this Miss Christopherson's apartment ? ”

“ No, ma'am.”

“ Show me to it, if you please. I would pre-
fer speaking to you there.”

“ A gentleman is waiting for Miss Christo-
pherson, madam ; but——”

“A gentleman—what kind of gentleman?” gasped forth Mrs. Thurtle.

“A gentleman of about thirty-two or three.”

“This is atrocious!” cried Mrs. Thurtle; “show me the way directly! No prevarication, please. I am the superintendent of the Asylum to which your lodger belongs; and it is a mercy for us all that I have come down to Hastings sooner than I anticipated, and in time, I hope, to put a stop to this.”

“To put a stop to what, ma’am? Good gracious! is anything wrong? Has anybody escaped?”

“A great deal is wrong!” cried Mrs. Thurtle. “These fine apartments are wrong in a young woman of Miss Christopherson’s position; that man must be wrong; everything is wrong; and it is Providence that has sent me hither this afternoon. Upstairs?”

“Yes, ma’am; the drawing-room floor.”

“Oh, of course, the best rooms in the house,” said Mrs. Thurtle ironically.

Mrs. Green led the way, pondering deeply

and trembling excessively. The new-comer might be the head of the mad-house, but it was her firm opinion that she was another visitor hopelessly deranged. She showed Mrs. Thurtle into the drawing-room, and stood by the door, ready for a precipitate flight and a call for the police.

Mrs. Thurtle sailed into the room, looked towards the gentleman on the hearth-rug, who returned her stare with interest after the faintest inclination of his head, to which salutation Mrs. Thurtle did not respond in any way.

“Now, Mrs. Green, let me have no mistake about this,” said Mrs. Thurtle, sitting down; “you have a young person lodging here of the name of Miss Christopherson; she has a child of fourteen years of age with her, by name Jane Spanswick; is that correct?”

“That is correct.”

“Miss Christopherson is in receipt of thirty pounds per annum from the City Clerks’ Orphan Asylum, of which institution I am the lady superintendent; and is allowed five pounds for

a fortnight's expenses for herself and pupil, and she"—fanning herself suddenly with a book that was on the table—"has taken these apartments in Warrior Square, at how much a-week, I should like to ask?"

"Five guineas a-week, ma'am, with extras."

"Then where does the money come from?—who supplies a governess with the means for this extravagance?"

The pale-faced man on the hearth-rug received Mrs. Thurtle's withering glance towards him with composure, and then smiled with a suddenness that was startling.

"You will excuse me, madam, but I do not quite follow you," he said.

"I am not addressing you," replied Mrs. Thurtle, sharply; "I will ask you some questions presently."

"Thank you. After Mrs. Green has done us the favour of retiring, perhaps?" said Mr. Lawson.

"No, sir, I will not be left alone with you,"

cried Mrs. Thurtle; "I would not trust myself alone with any man."

"It is as well to be prudent in these times," said Mr. Lawson coolly. "Take a seat, Mrs. Green, whilst I ask the superintendent of the City Clerks' Orphan Asylum to explain the reason why a lady of good family and great property is holding the subordinate position of governess in her charity-school. I was not aware that Miss Christopherson had adopted so strange a course, although prepared for any eccentricity on her part. She left her mother and her stepfather—I am her stepfather, madam—to be her own mistress, because a sense of duty led me to draw out a plan for her future course in life, which her independence would not allow her to follow—for her own advantage though it was; and she submits to the slavery of service, and to the orders of people immeasurably her inferiors. My stepdaughter," he said in a louder and more pompous tone of voice, as he poised himself upon his toes to address the astonished Mrs. Thurtle, "has lowered

us with herself, and we shall feel the indignity that has been put upon us for the remainder of our lives. Had she taken the place of superintendent—which she could have easily obtained—it would have been a disgrace to an old family; but to serve as governess is indeed a blow.”

“I don’t see—I don’t make out why—” began Mrs. Thurtle; and then she came to a full stop, fairly bewildered by the revelation which Mr. Lawson had taken so much pains to deliver. Mr. Lawson was a man of many words, and he recommenced directly:

“This City Clerks’ Orphan Asylum—an extremely ill-managed institution, madam,” Mr. Lawson said emphatically, “has been before me more than once, to my great annoyance. When Miss Christopherson, by the indiscreet codicil of a very indiscreet parent, came into her large property at eighteen years of age, she was foolish enough to give three thousand pounds to your absurd institution, and I fear has followed up this large donation by other grants, if she

be as passionately attached to orphan children as she was two years since ; and to have served as teacher to them argues very badly for her care of those great possessions, which it should be her duty to preserve to herself and her family. No woman—however Quixotic—has a right to be neglectful of a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. A hundred and fifty thousand pounds,” he repeated, with grave deliberation, “is a responsibility to herself, to her best friends, and to society.”

“A hundred and fifty thou——Mrs. Blue, will you be good enough to get me a glass of water?”

Mrs. Green hurried away, and returned with a glass of water to find Mr. Lawson still preaching at Mrs. Thurtle on his family’s importance, and overpowering that lady with his eloquence.

“It always struck me that there was something very superior about Miss Christopherson,” Mrs. Thurtle said feebly, as she took the glass from the landlady’s hand ; “but I did not realize—though I always suspected—that she was

of a good family. I have always thought——”

The door had opened again, and the subject of the long discussion was looking in upon them with keen attention.

“Maud, my child!” said Mr. Lawson, turning to her.

“My dear Miss Christopherson, I could not rest in London until I was sure that you had brought that poor child down in safety, and without any personal inconvenience,” cried Mrs. Thurtle.

“See to Miss Spanswick, Mrs. Green,” said Maud; “she is very tired. I have thought too much of myself, and have worn her out with a long drive.”

“Have you dined, ma’am?” asked Mrs. Green, with a deep curtsy.

“Yes, thank you.”

Then she turned and faced her two visitors, and it was doubtful by her expression of countenance which of them she was the more glad to see.

“Maud,” said Mr. Lawson again, advanc-

ing towards her with some slight hesitation.

“Presently, Mr. Lawson,” she said, almost impatiently; “not now, if you please. You have told Mrs. Thurtle?”

“Yes, I have,” he answered; “it was my duty——”

“You have precipitated an explanation and an apology,” she said, coldly; “but it is only by a few days. Mrs. Thurtle, my resignation of the post of governess at the City Clerks’ Orphan Asylum is already written, and will be sent to the establishment to-morrow. For the present I am still an official, by order of the board. Have you called with any commands for me?”

“Oh! no, not any, Miss Christopherson. The poor child is well, I hope?”

“She is tired with a long drive, that is all,” replied Maud. “Would you like to see her?”

“Oh! dear, no,” said Mrs. Thurtle, rising with alacrity, and remembering for the first time in her excitement Jane Spanswick’s late malady; “pray do not disturb her on my account. I will call to-morrow and have a chat with you. I

fear that I am intruding now. I—I just thought that I would see if you were comfortably placed. What a charming look-out you have here, to be sure! I always liked Warrior Square; my sister is staying in Robertson Terrace, near the hotel which they are building. Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Mr. Lawson.”

Mrs. Thurtle, after receiving somewhat cold responses to her final adieux, hurried downstairs in a state of great confusion, and clambered into the fly which had been waiting for her. The carriage and pair which Miss Christopherson had hired had not yet left the front of the house, and Mrs. Thurtle glanced from it to her own shabby conveyance, and felt more bewildered than ever. Mrs. Thurtle had a reverence for position and wealth; her whole life had been spent in futile efforts to get into society, incited by that miserable vanity which strives ever for a sphere above its own, and submits to a thousand rebuffs for one petty distinction. When she was a captain's wife, she had spent a great deal of her husband's money in the difficult art

of keeping up appearances; and when she was a widow, and had dropped to the management of the City Clerks' Orphan Asylum, she had carried all her pride to the new place, and tyrannized over those who had not rendered her homage; and now the woman who might have served her turn, and helped her onwards, and been a friend to her and lent her money—Mrs. Thurtle often had little bills coming in which she found it inconvenient to settle—she had been mistaken in, and had browbeaten, and had tried to work out.

“This will bring me to an early grave,” said Mrs. Thurtle to herself. “What a chance I have lost, if it is all true! A woman who could send three thousand pounds to an asylum, and only sign herself M. L.! It's wonderful!”

The rusty horse bore her and the fly back to her sister's apartments in Robertson Terrace, and bore her away for ever from these pages.

CHAPTER XIV.

GIVING WAY.

MAUD CHRISTOPHERSON, after formally bowing out the lady-superintendent of the City Clerks' Orphan Asylum, turned to the gentleman who had taken so much pains to obtain an interview with her. She was very pale; all the colour that a country drive had given her had faded from her cheeks, and the hard expression, which seemed natural to her at times, was there, as Jenny Spanswick had seen it, as she had seen it often herself, looking into her dressing-glass when the day was over, and there had been much to disturb her. She looked like a woman prepared to stand her ground—like one who had long ago made up her mind, and was annoyed—nay, almost incensed in her heart

—to encounter a man who had the audacity to seek to change it. Yes, certainly a bad-tempered woman was Maud Christopherson; he had always said so. Surveying her then from beneath his bushy black brows, he knew that there was another proof of her obduracy in the unwavering look—was it contemptuous? he hoped not—which she directed towards him from the vantage-ground of that hearth-rug, which he was reluctant to quit, and to which he had retreated when his step-daughter had failed to perceive that he had held his hands towards her. An unforgiving, unmalleable young woman, he was very sure.

She was the first to speak, standing by the table, on which she leaned her hand, and showing by that position her desire that the interview should be a brief one.

“I did not think that you would have considered it necessary to seek me out, Mr. Lawson,” she said coldly; “I understood that it was arranged that I should go my way, and that you and Mrs. Lawson should go yours. It was the

wish of the three parties to the contract."

"I regret that wish," he answered.

"I do not," was the reply.

"It was a quarrel—a bitter quarrel, I own—between us, and I take my share of the blame for a want of courtesy, or a want of sympathy with you. We were all three too proud, Maud, and did not allow enough for each other's failings. But I was sorry directly that you had left us."

"It is late in the day for an apology, Mr. Lawson," answered Maud; "it is not required by me, and it sits ungracefully on a man of your temperament."

"All is not forgotten or forgiven, then?" he said, frowning at her, though he tried very hard to keep his brows from contracting as he spoke.

"I am not likely to forget that my life was a misery at Brayling," said Maud Christopherson, with sudden warmth; "that you set my mother—Heaven help me! my own mother—against me, because your plans were not mine, or my

ideas about the money which my father left me were not your own ; because I was a woman who thought for herself, and you would have had me a puppet to think through you."

"You were young—so very young," he muttered.

"And yet—but all this has been said," she added, checking herself, "and there is no occasion for hard words between us. I spoke my mind in Brayling before I went away, and there is an end of the story. I was hasty in some things, I own that ; and I forgive much, perhaps all, for peace's sake ; but I forget nothing."

"This is implacability," he said.

"Why are you here to tell me this?" cried Maud Christopherson very angrily again. "I have not sought you out, or sent for you. You have no authority over me ; I am my own mistress ; and I shall never return to your home."

"Have you been happy away from us?"

"No," was the answer.

"You have sought better friends than your

mother and myself—truer ones, and more honest advisers,” he said satirically; “have you found them?”

“I am hard to please,” replied the stepdaughter, “or true friends and honest folk are very hard to meet with.”

“Ah! my child, because of your natural distrust; your quick temper, which resents everything; your eccentricity, which seeks strange methods of obtaining that which you require.”

“Possibly,” said Maud.

There was an embarrassing silence, which neither broke for a while. The man on the hearth-rug swayed from his heels to his toes, and surveyed the stepdaughter whom he had hoped to impress; and she stood looking down at the book which was close to her hand, as if considering that his last remarks were deserving of attention.

“You will think again of giving us up,” he said at last; “of the folly and the scandal which this unnatural separation has caused.”

She turned upon him at this, and he flinched

from the eyes which flashed at him their new fire.

“That folly and scandal were of your creating.”

“Your mother——”

“My mother told me in my dead father’s house that I made her miserable, that I stood between her and all comfort; and I went away,” she cried. “I shall never return.”

“Your mother was excited—we were all excited,” said Mr. Lawson; “and I hope we are all sorry now for past recriminations.”

“Has she said that she is sorry?” asked Maud eagerly.

“Yes,” replied her visitor.

“I am glad of that. Tell her I am sorry too,” said Maud quickly, as she turned away her face for an instant from him; “sorry for my own hard words, though I see with every day more clearly how much better the separation was for all of us.”

“No, Maud, it was not,” said Mr. Lawson

firmly ; “and you will see that presently with me. There,” with an easy cheerfulness, which did not sit particularly well upon him, “I have broken the ice. I have been met with some very hard words for the effort ; and I hope something will come of this, now that I have found you.”

“Found me ! I presume that Lord Evesby broke his promise to me,” said Maud, now very self-possessed ; “he was always a weak man, that poor bankrupt nobleman, who would have married my money for the sake of his estate, and taken me as a necessary incumbrance.”

“Lord Evesby has told me nothing, Maud—see how harshly you judge everybody ! You are among the arrivals in the town paper of this morning.”

“The town paper honours the governess.”

“Oh, that freak ! there, again—”

“Pardon me, but I have not asked for an opinion upon that,” she said ; “regard it as a freak. Think that I was mad, or that I had given all my money away, and it was necessary

I should get a situation somewhere ; but spare me the expression of your thoughts."

Mr. Lawson only caught at one part of this remonstrance, but it turned him of a greenish hue.

"Given all the money away," he said softly to himself; and he glared at her as though it was possible for a woman of her character to commit even so serious an act as that. He recovered himself after a minute's hard breathing, and said,

"I will not detain you longer, Maud. I see unhappily that a past reminiscence, for which I have expressed my regrets, and even heard your own, lies like a bar between us. I trust to remove it—upon my honour, I trust yet to remove it. Your mother's illness—"

"What!" said Maud, breaking in with a new eagerness, "is she ill? How long has she been ill?"

"Some weeks. She was taken ill in London, and the air of Hastings was recommended to her. Of course it is your mother who sends me here, and who hopes that you will come to

see her before she returns to The Woodlands. I should have mentioned this at once, but you have been too quick with me."

"And has she improved since her stay here?"

"No. She is weak, and anxious to get home."

"And the physicians—you have had physicians of course—what do they say?"

"Sir Benjamin, who is staying here, and whom I called in this morning, thinks that it is a serious case, which only time and freedom from anxiety may cure. I fear," he said gloomily, "that she is past cure, then."

"Has she—she ever asked for me—ever wished to see me?" asked Maud slowly.

"Yes."

"Tell her that I will come, then—for a few minutes—only a few minutes," she said with sudden haste, "to judge for myself how ill she is, and not in any way to distress her. Write your present address there, please," she added, giving him Lord Evesby's sealed envelope with

a shaking hand, "and I will call to-night. Tell her, if she thinks that I shall disturb her in any way, she need not see me—it may not be necessary."

"She will rejoice at the good news which I take back to her."

"She is very ill, then?" said Maud suspiciously.

"You doubt my word?" he asked reproachfully.

"No," she replied; "I will come. Let me see her alone."

"Miss Christopherson, I will not intrude upon you again this evening," he replied, with a stiff bow. Then he walked out of the room and from the house, like a man whose feelings had been hurt. But when he was round the corner of Warrior Square, he rubbed one black glove over the other with considerable energy, and chuckled to himself so loudly, that a shabby man in a large hat, who had been hovering about the square all day, looked after him with deep attention.

Meanwhile, Maud Christopherson had knocked at the door of Jenny Spanswick's room, and entered. Jenny was lying on the bed, looking very tired and wan, but she smiled as the governess entered.

"I am getting better," she said; "I feel strong enough now."

"That is well," replied Maud; "I have rung for tea, which will brighten you, Jenny. After tea I am going to see my mother."

Jenny Spanswick's black eyes rapidly increased in size.

"See how selfish I am to leave you!" Maud said—"just as we were getting such good friends, too; and I had much to tell you this evening about a new plan that I have formed, in which you and I are to play the chief parts—you and I together, of all the odd people in the world."

"Yes," said Jenny, marvelling at her excitement.

"But we will talk of that to-morrow—a long talk, Jenny," said Miss Christopherson; "and I

will tell you all my secrets, and you shall see what a disagreeable, ill-grained, furious woman I am. And yet you will like me in time—in the good time at which I am looking there.”

Miss Christopherson's face was flushed now, and in her deep gray eyes there was a steady light, which gave life to her face, and made her very handsome in that hour. Jenny regarded her still with wonder.

“Come in to tea soon—or shall I bring it to you?”

“No, no, I am not tired. I look so, perhaps; but I have been asleep, Miss Maud, and dreaming of the beautiful ride over again, and the bright country, and you.”

“Of me? Why, did I not give you the nightmare?” said Maud, laughing.

“How I shall remember this day!—how I shall always look back upon it as the first true holiday of my life! Oh! dear, what a deal of money it must have cost you!”

“I have been saving money lately,” said Maud; “and there was no one to say that I

was improvident and rash—not one. And there will be no one to say that to me ever again. Let them talk as they please, Maud Christopherson is her own mistress to the end of the chapter. Did I tell you that my mother has asked to see me?”

“Yes,” said Jenny.

“My own mother, with whom I parted bad friends, and who was a good mother when the father was living—the dear, good, thoughtful father, who saw this day for me, Jenny. Come in to tea soon.”

Maud Christopherson departed; and when Jenny Spanswick had shaken off her depression, she followed her into the drawing-room, and found the governess sitting with her bonnet and shawl on, tapping her fingers restlessly upon the edge of the tea-tray.

“What a time you have been!” she said. “Did I tell you that my mother was ill?”

“No, Miss Maud.”

“Yes, she is ill, and late visits always unsettle invalids for the night. You should know

that; for when your father called upon you that Saturday night, how ill you were the rest of the day! I go early, I shall return early; I would not disturb her for the world. She was always a delicate woman, Jenny. When she was a girl, they used to call her the Brayling Rose, and everybody used to fall in love with her. But she grew stronger after I was born, they said, and she was a high-spirited woman always. That is why we had a little quarrel, she and I, for I took after her, having her spirit too; and my father, he was a proud man, who could not bear a word said in opposition to his own; so my hateful disposition is not to be wondered at. What are you staring in that manner for, Jenny?"

"N—nothing," said Jenny Spanswick.

"I'll tell you a long story to-morrow, and you shall advise me what to do, though I will not promise to take your advice. How hot the room is!—how hot the tea is! I wish you would not stare so, Jenny."

Jenny Spanswick looked into her tea-cup,

and stirred her tea round and round, and stared no more at the governess. Her heart was beating very rapidly; for Miss Christopherson had mentioned her father in her excited speech, and Jenny was not sure that she had meant to say her uncle. But Miss Christopherson was unaware of what she was saying that evening. Her mother had asked to see her; her mother was ill; and the only friend left was the dark-browed man whom she had taken for her second husband, and who was eight years her junior. It was dark before tea was over, and the servant had brought in the table-lamp. The brighter light cast Lord Evesby's letter into greater prominence, and Miss Christopherson took up the missive, read the address which her step-father had written on the envelope, and then broke the seal, and glanced at Lord Evesby's hasty lines.

"Poor fellow, how frightened he is!" she said, tearing the letter into fragments. "I wonder what will become of him!"

She rose to her feet hastily.

“How the time has run on! I shall not be late, but do not sit up for me. Get a long night’s rest, and to-morrow——”

“What of to-morrow?” asked Jenny curiously.

“Why, the morrow begins a new life. Mark my words, for I am a prophetess, Jenny.”

Maud Christopherson went away in the same excited manner. The new life apart from the Asylum appeared to have come; and the weary school-hours, the uncongenial atmosphere into which it had pleased her eccentricity to penetrate, seemed to belong already to that past which the heiress and the poor man’s daughter had shared together. She went away singing; she almost forgot her mother’s illness in the thought of seeing that mother again, in the remembrance of the wish expressed to meet the daughter who had rebelled and left home. She walked rapidly along Eversfield Place, looking for the number of her step-father’s lodgings; and it was not till she was in the hall that her high spirits deserted her, and she became very grave and anxious.

"Mrs. Lawson?" she said to a page who had opened the door.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Give this card to her."

The page glanced at the card.

"Oh! I was to show you up at once, if you please."

Miss Christopherson followed the page upstairs to a well-furnished sitting-room on the first floor.

"Miss Christopherson," he announced.

She passed in, and the page closed the door behind her. The room was dimly lighted by the gas, as though the glare of light had been subdued to suit the weak sight of her who lay upon the sofa,—a tall thin woman, with a face whose handsomeness was fading fast away. She looked up with a forced air of indifference, that checked the daughter's first step towards her for an instant, until the change in her had struck home to the heart. Then the new manner, born of the impulse which had shadowed the face of the younger woman, and drawn her

figure up erect and stiff at the greeting, vanished suddenly, and Maud went across the room with faltering steps and arms outstretched.

“Oh, my poor mamma—my dear mamma! may I come to you again?”

She sank down on her knees; and the mother, changing also very suddenly, flung her arms round her who had yearned for her embrace.

“My little Maudy,” she murmured, “you are welcome here. You have come back to me, then?”

“Yes, once more, and for a little while,” replied the daughter.

Then they were both very still, both very happy at the meeting, though the self-willed girl had already implied that she was not there “for good.” She half knelt at her mother’s side, with her face hidden from that part of the room at which the invalid was gazing through the tears that had risen to her eyes. Maud did not know this; she was too disturbed at heart to attempt to watch her mother’s face, to be at

once doubtful of her, or of those about her. She did not observe that another door had been opened noiselessly, and closed again, and that for an instant the grim face of her step-father had peered in upon the scene from the shadows lurking in the darkened room. She was a suspicious woman,—at least everyone said so, and she had more than once confessed it to herself,—but she did not dream of plotters in that hour of reconciliation.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SICK MOTHER.

THERE was a long silence, and it was not till Maud Christopherson was sitting by her mother's side, and had studied her intently for some minutes, that the faint voice of the invalid said a little querulously,

“Do you find me very much altered, Maud?”

“Yes, mamma—very much.”

Maud was a plain speaker, and seldom disguised her thoughts. It was a bad habit, despite its truthfulness, and had made her some enemies. The mother, who did not like plain-speaking, flinched a little.

“I am looking my worst to-night,” she said in explanation. “This silk dress does not suit me—brown never did, if you remember, Maud

—and I have suffered a great deal of pain to-day. I daresay that I look ten years older to you?”

“Not so much as that, perhaps.”

She had not aged so much as she had lost her brightness of complexion, and become sallow and sunken-eyed. She was a woman of forty, who looked very ill indeed; not a woman prematurely lined and gray, but a woman fretting herself away before her time.

“And yet you were not quite eighteen when you left The Woodlands when that terrible temper, which would not give way, asserted itself and took you from us.”

“Shall we speak of my stubbornness—my conviction that it was better for me to leave you to your husband? Shall we go back to the times of a bitter disagreement, mamma? Is it worth while?”

“No; it is not,” replied Mrs. Lawson; “and if you are sorry—”

“Sorry that I wounded your feelings, yes—I wrote and told you so, but you returned my

letter unopened ; not sorry that I left home. I do not own it," she cried proudly ; "I have not come to own it, but to see the mother whom I love, and who has asked to see me."

"I did not—" began Mrs. Lawson ; then she paused and wrung her fingers, thickly girt with rings, together.

"You did not?" said Maud quickly.

"That is, I did not ask till to-day ; for you had no right to leave me, and to assert your own independence so completely. You were all to me."

"Mamma !" and the face that bent over the fretful woman's was full of love and earnestness.

"And I missed you, Maud ; and that is all I will say of the past, except," looking very firm for an instant, "that I thought I would rather die than ask one so undutiful to come back."

"And what has made you so ill as this?" asked Maud quickly.

She was a girl anxious to defend herself, quick to be led into argument, and to speak warmly

in her own defence; but she repressed the impulse that night, and struggled hard with the little self-command of which she had to boast. She dashed away almost regretfully from that old subject, which had influenced her character, shadowed much of her life, and wherein no one could see her in the light in which she had set herself.

"I have been worried, Maud; little things always worry me," the mother replied; "and giving way in health has fretted me more than I would care to own to anyone save you. And then I had no one to understand me, no one in whom I could trust."

"Mr. Lawson," suggested Maud.

"Oh, he is very good to me, of course," she said languidly; "but a husband is not like a daughter, and he has many pursuits which take him from home; and then I am wholly alone."

"I see," said Maud, slowly and thoughtfully.

"Of course, I am happy enough," Mrs. Lawson continued, though she tried hard to keep down a sudden lump which came halfway into

her throat, and rendered her for an instant speechless. "I remember—that you prophesied I should be very unhappy with Alfred; but how wrong you were to say that! See how many times in your life, Maud, you have been wrong!"

"Yes," said Maud absently, "I have, it seems."

"It is hard to be shattered in this way, and at my early age," Mrs. Lawson said. "I did not feel anything very deeply until I had so much time to think. I lie like this, thinking from morning till night, for days together, Maud; and then I get strong again—almost."

"You read?"

"I was never fond of reading. I do not remember getting through a book in my life," replied the mother wearily. "I lived for society when I was one of its ornaments. I say it without vanity, I hope, but I *was* one of its ornaments, and not a long while ago either."

Mrs. Lawson sighed, and the child by her first marriage sighed also, but not for the same reason.

"You're not unlike me in some respects," said

Mrs. Lawson, looking at her daughter with great interest again, "but your eyes are gray, and mine are blue. You are rather pretty, but at your age I was very beautiful. Why should I not be proud of that now? It is the truth, Maud."

"How long have you been ill?"

"Four or five months. Is that not cruel?"

"Cruel of whom—of God?"

The mother shut her eyes and shivered. After a while the jewelled hands went up to her head, and she said half peevishly,

"I do not mean that; but you were always quick and sharp and disagreeable with those ideas, which, I believe, began with that dreadful Brayling Sunday-school teaching. I do not know who gave you first those serious notions, Maud, but they did not improve you, and they made you—what shall I say?"

"What I am," answered Maud; "and that is not very serious, after all. Sometimes I have a sense of duty, as he calls it—duty was always

his favourite word—and he has mentioned it more than once or twice to-day.”

“You hate him still,” said Mrs. Lawson. “I know the old ring of the voice, the old scornful looks, too well.”

“I do not respect him yet,” said Maud, between her compressed lips, “but I will not say I hate him, mamma. I did try, with all my heart and soul, to respect him once, at your bidding. Did you not even make me take his name?”

“And you failed to like him?”

“How the past clings to you and me!” said Maud impatiently; “and I said to-night that I would not breathe a word concerning it, but that this should be a peaceful meeting. Let it be so—let it live for ever as a tender memory between us two, cancelling all that went before it.”

“If it could,” said the mother—“oh, if it could! Maud, I thought that I should never live to say the words, ‘Come back to me;’ but I ask now, forgetting everything that set you

and me apart. I should be happier with you ; I should look to you for strength—for our old family strength of mind and purpose—now that I have given way. Come back to me.”

Maud put her arms round her mother’s neck again, and kissed her many times before replying. When she answered her, her eyes were full of tears.

“No, not back to you, until I can render you content with me, which is not yet, and may not be ever. But,” she added quickly, as this strange mother appeared to shrink from her, “I will not hide from you again, but be ready to steal to your side should trouble or affliction press too closely. Standing a little way apart, in that ‘fair distance which lends enchantment to the view’,”—she could not repress this satire even in her grief and affection,—“I shall be more the daughter ; and in the distance I shall be always at your command, until the time comes—which it may, which I think now it will—when you and I are together thus for good.”

She must have been of a loving and affection-

ate nature, and had borne much before she left home ; for the arms stole round the mother's neck again, and only dropped away when the embrace was not returned.

“Ah! you will have your own way, Maud,” said the mother ; “and oh! the strange way that it is! I am very tired; I am not used to excitement. Shall we say good night now?”

“Yes, I think so,” said Maud, rising.

She had changed colour for an instant, as though the “old terrible temper” with which everyone reproached her was about to assert itself once more; but if so, her self-restraint was marvellous that night. She stooped over her, and bade God bless her in a troubled voice.

“What a time ago since you said that!” murmured Mrs. Lawson.

“No; it was only last night.”

Maud was at the door, when Mrs. Lawson said feebly,

“When shall I see you again?”

“Before I leave Hastings. I am sketching out a new life for myself with a new friend, who

I think loves me a little ; and when the colours are filled in, I will come to you."

"Engaged?" asked the mother eagerly.

"Oh! no, that will never be again," was the quick reply. "This is a girl friend—a child, whom I can train to something, I am sure."

"This is another folly, Maud, I know already."

"If it be a folly, I will come back when it ends."

She went away with another "good night," and no one met her on the stairs, or between that room and the road, which ran on by the side of the sea. She closed the door upon herself, and was grateful to Mr. Lawson for keeping his word to her; less grateful than she might have been had she seen him step quickly from an ante-room, which opened into the drawing-room she had quitted, and shake his fist in the face of the woman lying there, and who looked at him steadily for all his threatening attitude.

"You did not say enough—you did not play your part well, I tell you."

"I did not play any part," she answered.

"You did not beg her to come as you should have done. Your accursed pride, which she inherits from you, I suppose, rose up at every turn and spoiled all."

"I did my best. Don't shout at me, Lawson; I am not quite—strong—enough to bear it."

Then Mrs. Lawson, who had married this man for love, fainted away; and whilst she lay there like a dead woman, the daughter went on her way full of thought, and yet with a heart that was lighter than she had known it for years. One trouble had been softened, perhaps removed; and of the shadow of another that was to fall upon her from that night she was not yet aware.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS CHRISTOPHERSON'S ESCORT.

A FINE small rain was descending when Maud Christopherson stepped from her mother's lodgings into the street. She hesitated for an instant, as if to return, and then after one glance at the dark sky, she set forth upon her homeward walk. To return would be to meet Mr. Lawson, possibly to have his escort home under a silk umbrella, to listen to his orations, to be annoyed by his pomposity or by his grave protestations that everything in his life had been done for the best, however it might have influenced her career for much that was worse. She had told her mother that she did not hate the man, but she shuddered when she thought of him. She was a woman who

believed that she had seen farther into his character than most people had—who guessed what kind of man Alfred Lawson was, even when the mother was foolish enough to believe that he had loved her for herself. The mother understood Alfred Lawson's character by this time; and it was not a happy knowledge, though she had not complained to the prodigal daughter who had found her way to her side.

Maud was satisfied with the result of her visit; she had proved that it was not want of love for the mother that had kept her away; and the mother had turned to her, and had shown more affection towards her than she had ever evinced since the man in the scarlet hunting-coat had died in the great drawing-room at The Woodlands. And the daughter had asserted her independence, thought Maud, without turning the mother from her; the position was clearly established, and each would know the other better from that night. Her mother had never done her justice, Maud was assured; she had taken the colouring

in fact - father's

of her character from the husband; and Maud had resented the interference and rebelled against them both. She had been sure that there was no love for her in the house of her dead father; that everybody had been jealous of her command of riches at an early age, and had done their best to foil her in their possession, to get power over them and her, to crush her spirit and subdue her will. And she had resented this, and left them at last after a bitter quarrel. She had sorrowed at the parting more than the mother had done, she was certain, and she was glad to be friends with this strange mother again. She had often wondered how Mrs. Lawson had got on in the world without her; who had been the slave to many whims and little vanities to which she had closed her eyes?—who had seen the mother at her worst, and been silent as to her failings after she had gone? Ah, perhaps some one better-tempered than herself, if less discreet, and with whom Mrs. Lawson had agreed very well! No one had ever agreed with her, and

Maud was assured, morbidly assured, that no one ever would. As she became known to those who had at first appeared to like her, so she became feared a little and disliked a great deal; for she was hasty, and betrayed herself. She was slow to praise any one and quick to blame, and altogether objectionable. Perhaps she should grow out of it; she only wanted some one to understand her as she fancied she had a right to be understood; some one to love her for herself, and not for the money which her father had left her. Then Jenny Spanswick had evinced a sudden and warm affection, as though the child had seen farther into her heart than all the grown up people by whom she had been surrounded; and that had set her thinking deeply. And an old woman had spoken of a grandson who had watched her with a long and patient interest from his seat in church, and had liked her for her looks; and that was a pleasant reminiscence also, though the boy had been reading novels too early, and

had deserved flogging for his undevotional exercises, and his shocking precocity.

Maud Christopherson thought of all these things as she went towards home in the soft-falling rain—thought of everything charitably, and wondered why they all came uppermost, and were born of the meeting with the mother. Everything appeared to be brightening around her, and she who had been a cheerful girl under difficulties, and had been determined all her life to keep her disappointments to herself, now found herself cheerful in earnest. The mother would soon be well again, and she would see the daughter very frequently.

“I am afraid, Miss Christopherson, that you will get wet,” said a voice close to her ear; and the instant afterwards an umbrella was raised politely over her head, and she found Mr. Marmaduke Spanswick walking on by her side. On any other occasion she would have resented this gentleman’s obtrusiveness, and forgotten that he was Jenny’s first cousin; but she was in

good spirits to-night, and the motive for keeping everybody at arm's length was apparent no longer.

"Thank you, Mr. Spanswick," she replied; "I did not look for rain, and so went to my mother's house unprovided for the contingency."

"May I have the pleasure—the inexpressible pleasure—of shielding you from the elements as far as Warrior Square?" he asked, with one of his best bows.

Miss Christopherson smiled at his politeness, and remembered the bland face which had bowed towards her so oppressively through his little trap in Junction Street.

"Thank you," she said again.

She could not gracefully decline his escort; and as there was something amusing in Mr. Spanswick's attention, a something inconsistent and provoking in his presence at Hastings, and as she remembered suddenly two or three questions which she would like to put to him, she consented to the infliction of his

company. Yes, she must have been in one of her best tempers that night to take the arm which he suddenly offered to her in an angular fashion.

"Been to your mother's, eh, Miss Christopher-son?" he said in so very careless a manner, that Maud looked up at him on the instant. "Ah, there's nothing like being dootiful, is there? I didn't know your mother lived in Hastings—you never told me that."

"No, I never told you that," said Maud drily.

"Hadn't time, p'raps," he said; "but when we get better friends, p'raps you will. And about that young Lord Evesby, too; it's funny you should know him."

"It is funny," replied Maud; "I have often laughed at it myself."

"I hope you're too sensible a girl—upon my soul, I'm sure you are—to have your head turned by a lord, Miss Christopherson; and he's no great shakes for a lord, you know. Lots of bills out after him, and you can buy up his paper cheap enough. He's a good fellow in his

way, they say, but always on the wrong side, and always—‘wanted.’”

Maud became very stern for an instant, and the contraction over the eyes to which Uncle William had objected was suddenly visible in full force, and would have surprised Marmaduke had he been studying her countenance just then. But he was looking straight ahead of him; and Maud, at first indignant at his advice and familiarity, was quick to seize the absurdity of the position, and to allow one of her rare musical laughs to escape her. When Marmaduke looked down at her, he thought that he had never seen such a pretty and amiable face in his life.

“It’s hard to laugh at him, us two,” he said; “but he is a poor fellow. I’d lay a good wager that with my Emporium in Junction Street, and with what I’ve saved besides, I’m half a dozen times a better man.”

“Very likely. I do not suppose Lord Evesby has put much money by.”

“He’s put a blessed lot of other people’s money by,” said Marmaduke, energetically. “By

altogether, I mean. You know what I mean," he added, with a little jerk of his arm on which her hand was placed; "for you are as sharp as most girls. That's why I liked you at first, Miss Christopherson. I saw how sharp you were."

"Possibly, I am not quite a fool," Maud answered.

"Do you remember asking me what 'S. G.' meant at Spitalfields? I thought that was sharp, you know;" and Mr. Marmaduke Spanswick suddenly roared with laughter, and frightened a wet policeman, whom he was passing, into the roadway, "deuced sharp."

"How do you like Hastings, Mr. Spanswick?" asked Maud.

"It's a nice place—a stylish place in its way, but wants life. Not but what I could get on very comfortably here with people to my fancy;" and he looked at Miss Christopherson, and almost sighed.

"Ah! yes, and with people to whom you would be a fancy too," said Maud; "but then appreciative people are scarce."

“By Jove! they are indeed! I’ve only met——”

“What does your father think of Hastings?”

“Eh? Who?” said Marmaduke.

“Your father. You have a father, I believe?”

“Oh! yes, I’ve got a father,” replied Marmaduke, gazing ahead of him in an unconcerned way, but somewhat damaging the effect by trying to take in his fair charge with the corners of his eyes.

“And how does he like Hastings?”

Marmaduke did not answer immediately. Miss Christopherson was about to repeat the question for the third time, when he shouted with laughter again.

“Didn’t I say just now that you were a sharp one? I like a sharp young woman. If there’s anything in all the world calculated to arouse my admiration, it’s a woman with her wits about her,” he cried. “There’s heaps of silly, pretty, vacant, woolly-headed girls in every street, but I admire one of your shrewdness. It’s a novelty—it’s refreshing.”

"I wish that you would not flatter me so much, Mr. Spanswick ; it is very embarrassing."

"I don't flatter. If I speak——"

"And he likes Hastings—the air agrees with him?"

"Oh ! yes ; he heard from Jenny, and came down at once. He's awfully fond of Jenny. I call her his craze, myself ; and I gave him a few days' holiday, and here he is sure enough. How did you know he was here?"

"I saw you and him together last night, at the corner of the square."

"Did you, though ? The dev— how very singular ! Yes, I was showing him where Jenny lodged with you. I hope he may be allowed to see her ?"

"Yes, he may come," said Maud Christopher-son. "And how did you discover my address so quickly, Mr. Spanswick ? The Visitors' List was not published till this morning."

"Well, I was anxious to pay my respects ; and I came down to St. Leonards, and made a few inquiries of the railway guards and the fly-

men. I did not like to lose sight of you, you see."

He jerked his right arm again, and again Miss Christopherson frowned at the familiarity.

"Where is William Spanswick now?" asked she.

"Asleep, I should say. I don't know for certain; he is not lodging with me."

"He is not at my house, I hope?" said Maud. "I have given no consent yet, and if he desires to see Jenny, he must ask my permission in the first place."

"Of course. That's right; that's the rules of propriety."

They had reached the corner of Warrior Square, and Maud drew her hand from the arm of her escort.

"Not a-going yet? I must insist on seeing you to the door—I really must now," said Marmaduke Spanswick.

"Thank you, but I think the rain has ceased."

"It's coming down as 'ard as ever," replied Mr. Spanswick.

"I will wish you good night," said Maud, turning from him.

"One moment, Miss Christopherson," Marmaduke said hastily. "This has been a happy walk, and a happy opportunity to speak to you, but I haven't made the most of it. I've something to say to you about Jenny and the old man—something particular—and I may as well out with it."

"What have you to say?" replied Maud, stopping at this appeal.

"Would you mind walking on a bit?" he asked, persuasively.

"Very much. What is it, Mr. Spanswick?"

He did not like her looks quite so well as he had done in the course of the evening, but he faced them with his charming frankness.

"The old man and I have been talking about Jenny a great deal; she's fourteen, and quite a big girl for school, in fact; and as I'm in a position to give her a situation in the Emporium, it's been thought a good time to write to the

Asylum, offering to take our relation off the hands of the authorities."

"Indeed! Has the letter been sent?"

"Yes, I think it has."

"The Council would object to Jane being placed in a shop in Spitalfields. The orphans are provided with situations in private establishments. At times they are assisted to emigrate. And as a rule—and a wise rule—they are not allowed to enter any service until they have reached the age of sixteen years."

"But as a relation, with a good business—"

"I should protest against it," said Maud.

"I don't see that anybody has a right to keep her against her inclination," said Marmaduke; "the Asylum ain't a prison, and you can't help a girl having a will of her own."

"Does she wish to leave the institution?"

"Yes, she does."

"It is not true!" said Maud, stamping one little foot upon the pavement; "how dare you tell me a falsehood with this unblushing effrontery?"

"Upon my word—upon my word and honour, Miss Christopherson, that's hard upon a fellow," said Marmaduke. "I'd not deceive you; I'd do anything in the world to help you. If you ever want a friend, you've only to come to the Spitalfields Emporium, and ask for its proprietor; and when Jenny's with us, I hope you will come, and make a friend of her, and me, and all of us."

"I make no friends."

"I hope you do not look upon us as enemies," said Marmaduke slowly, "or think of doing us any harm?"

"What harm can I do you?"

"Nothing; I am speaking, as I may say, figuratively. But a doubt of honest people does harm, in its way. And if you have a doubt, miss, I'd rather that you spoke it out downright, and let me or him answer it to your face. I'm frank and open."

"I will tell your father my doubts the first time that I meet him," said Maud; "I am waiting for him now."

“But——”

“Do not follow me ; I will not have it. You forget your place !” cried Maud, now fairly roused.

“But——” he began again.

“Go back ! I suspect you ; I suspect her father—the man who calls himself *her* uncle.”

“By George, I thought you did !” he cried ; “but it can be explained—and what cannot be explained can be squared. You are a woman of the world ; sharp as a needle, I see that,” he added, with his admiration undisguised, and as frank and open as his character ; “and we can talk of terms, you and I together, like sensible people. Don’t go just yet ; one moment longer. You’re a governess with a wretched salary, and I can offer you a situation worth double the money. There, I’ll turn out old Kayley for you ; he’s not fit for work now, and you’ll be an ornament to the Emporium. Don’t do nothing in a hurry, there’s a dear good girl ; it won’t be the worse for you,” he went on with increasing excitement, and flourishing his umbrella wildly

above his head; "and you may be mistaken, for I only say, give us time. You won't be thought any the better of at the institution for making a fuss about nothing—or next to nothing—as you will do. They may put you in flash lodgings, and allow you money for carriages and pairs; but it's a corporation, and comes out of the expenses. I can do better than that. Give the place up, and have fifty pounds a-year as book-keeper at my crib. There, will you, now? say done!"

He held his hand towards her, and Maud Christopherson saw by the light of the gas lamps that he had turned very pale. She did not comprehend in what way her discovery affected him in any degree, and was surprised at his vehemence and at his clumsy efforts at negotiation; but it did not concern her, save that his manner annoyed her very much. She turned upon him finally.

"Mr. Spanswick, you are a miserable wretch!" she said.

She walked hastily from him towards the

house, and he shut up his umbrella, crossed the road, and sat himself down on the wet bench facing the sea, which leaped towards him, and roared at his discomfiture.

“Good Lord, it’s all up!” he said.

He put his hands before his face, and tried to think of what would happen to him and the Emporium if all were known—if everything came to the front to dismay him, as he was sure it would do. He screwed himself half round upon the bench, and looked towards the house in the square long and anxiously.

“I’ll wait for the old fool, and hear what’s the end of it all. I could have married that woman—and she’s the very devil, I’m sure.”

A sudden paroxysm of sneezing reminded him of his indiscretion; and like a man careful of his health, he raised his umbrella over his head, and got up from his damp seat. But he wandered to and fro restlessly along the Parade, keeping always in sight the house wherein Maud Christopherson held watch and ward over Jenny Spanswick.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FATHER AT BAY.

THE governess of the City Clerks' Orphan Asylum—we may still designate her thus, as her letter of resignation had not been forwarded to the Council—went home in a disturbed state of mind. A little had always affected her; and here had arisen upon her journey home a great deal to unsettle her. One of the two men who had watched her house last night had indirectly attempted to bribe her into silence, had told her that it was Jenny Spanswick's wish to leave the institution, and enter service at a tally-shop in Spitalfields. And the other man, she felt assured, was in her house arranging this matter with Jane, and taking her not for an instant into consideration—save

into that consideration which could dupe her most completely.

“Has anyone called during my absence?” she asked of the servant who admitted her.

“Yes; the old gent who has asked for you two or three times to-day, my lady.”

Mary dropped a deep curtsey; she had heard the story of the hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

“Mr. Spanswick?”

“It was some sich outlandish name,” said Mary; “he said that he had your permission to see her, and—”

“How long has he been here?”

“He came the very instant after you had gone, my lady.”

“Don’t call me ‘my lady,’ girl; you should know better.”

After this reproof, which cut Mary to the quick, Miss Christopherson went upstairs, and entered the drawing-room.

They were sitting on the couch where Jenny had slept the preceding night, talking very ear-

nestly together. The girl had been crying, for her eyes were red with weeping, and there was altogether on her face an expression of suffering and of anguish that Maud Christopherson was not sorry to see. For here, at least, had been a struggle not to deceive her—a battle, possibly, between the old love for the father and the new love for her.

William Spanswick rose to his feet at the first glimpse of the new-comer, and bowed obsequiously towards her. He had been unprepared for her appearance. She had seen that in his first start of surprise; but he had quickly recovered himself, and was completely on his guard. He hastened to explain his presence before any questions were put to him; for her old look, which he did not like—which had set him against her from the first moment of his acquaintance with her—was very manifest that night.

“I hope you will not take it ill that I have called in your absence, Miss Christopherson,” he said apologetically. “I have been unfortunate

enough to miss you to-day several times ; and hearing that Jenny had reached home, I could not resist the opportunity of seeing her. You are surprised to find me in Hastings."

"Not at all. It is very natural."

"Of course, I do not intend to be continually intruding," he said. "I have no right; my position," shrugging his shoulders, "will not allow of it even, until after dark. But with the remembrance of much past kindness to me and her, I will ask your permission to see her now and then."

Miss Christopherson listened very patiently, taking off her bonnet and cloak meanwhile, and looking at him as at a curious specimen of humanity which had crossed her path and perplexed her. She sat down as he concluded, and the gesture of her hand implied a wish that William Spanswick should be seated also. When he had resumed his place by Jenny's side, she said very firmly, "I refuse that permission."

"Refuse! Miss Christopherson, you refuse me that?"

“Yes, for the present; perhaps for ever, or until you understand me more clearly. I had hoped to have been spared this interview until a later date, for I am weary to-night; but you have stolen in against my knowledge, and your spy outside was not quick enough to put you on your guard.”

“My spy!” he repeated.

“Oh! Miss Maud—” began Jenny, when the governess stopped her on the instant.

“Silence, Jenny: do not interrupt me. Let us three comprehend our true positions this evening, as we have met together, and agree, if we can, to the future. You,” pointing to William Spanswick, “are Jenny’s father?”

“I—I—” he began, when she half rose in her chair, and leaned across the table towards him.

“Deny it, and I shall utterly despise you.”

He gave in. His hands fell to his side; he bowed his head submissively, and said not another word in defence.

“Jenny’s ravings were born of truth, and not

of fever," said she; "and I thought so from the first. Man, what made you act in this dishonourable fashion?"

"Stern necessity!" he answered, without looking up.

"There was no necessity for so complete a lie. You had better have starved with Jenny, than have testified to so much that was false."

"I was starving, and that mattered little; but she was starving, and that mattered a great deal. I had been ruined by trusting in men who I had thought were as honest as myself. I had been dragged down by sharpers whom society respects still. I had lost all but this child. If she had gone to the workhouse, she would have gone perhaps to her ruin, for there is no care, no love, or sympathy in that place; and when my brother died in Paris I thought of Jenny, and how easy it was to set down his death as my own, and get her into this asylum as the orphan child of an old subscriber. A grave fault, Miss Christopherson, but it has been my ambition to repair it."

“Repair it now.”

“Ah, that is not possible.”

“It is. I believe it is, if you will follow my advice, and trust not to that low mind outside, by which you have been ruled. William Spanswick, I hope—I think—that there is some good left in you.”

“I hope there is. I don’t know,” he said helplessly.

He looked towards Jenny, who had buried her face in the couch; he looked after a while at this terrible woman, his accuser.

“What is your plan of action?” she asked.

“My—my plan,” he repeated in his old way, but as a method of gaining time to respond to her questions, “is to wait, if you will be merciful, and give me a chance, and keep my secret. No one will guess it; but the first suspicion, setting the faintest inquiry in motion, will condemn me. You are too young to be pitiless—you are a woman—you will not break this child’s heart with my disgrace and punishment.”

“You think only of the child?”

"Only of her, so help me, Heaven?" he cried earnestly.

"You are content with any sacrifice which affects you and spares her?"

"Yes."

"Go to the Council, then; face the members of the committee at the next board-meeting, confess the truth, and throw yourself upon their mercy."

He drew a long breath, and sat back against the wall, with a new horror in his looks.

"It will be madness," he faltered forth.

"It will be justice. If you be repentant of this sin, it will exonerate you in the sight of God and man."

"And put me in a prison for two years," he added bitterly.

"They will hear of you as an old subscriber. I have influence. I hope to intercede for you—to raise money to reimburse the committee for the expense to which they have been put by Jane's education and board. I will do all that I can."

"You are a governess," he said.

"I will be your daughter's friend. Leave her to me. A sister of my own should not have a greater care or a deeper love."

"You would teach her to forget me, or to think what a disgrace I was to her," he murmured.

"You shift your ground—the truth appals you."

"Yes, Miss Christopherson," he said gloomily, "the truth appals me."

"Then you are a coward."

"I was a coward years ago. I lost all faith in the world, as in men's professions," said William Spanswick furiously. "And now to a committee—my God, to a committee!—you would have me trust my safety. I have only this girl to love—only this child to regard me with any semblance of affection—and you would deprive me of her."

"I ask you not to fear the truth or me. I ask your confidence."

"Oh! you are a good woman," he said, with

a strange bitterness in his earnestness. "I own it—I see it; but I see also how your exalted idea of what is right would sink me for ever. It cannot be done." He shook his head emphatically.

"You will not trust me, then?" said Miss Christopherson.

"I will trust you with all my heart," he said; "but I cannot follow your advice."

"Then there is only the alternative of my telling the truth in your place," said Maud firmly.

"You will do this—you will abuse my confidence?"

"You have put no confidence in me," replied the governess; "and the child must not stand longer in the place of some poor orphan girl, looking in vain for shelter from the world. I will not have that."

"I will withdraw her. Let me take her away at once," he said eagerly; "we will be heard of no more."

"And with you—a man who has committed

a crime, and affects to repent of it, a man whose whole life has been a deceit!—what becomes of her? Would you drag her down to your level, and render all the teaching that she has had completely valueless? No; I am her guardian until she is old enough to choose for herself, and to see what is right and just. You must not take her away.”

“Jenny,” he said, wringing his hands, “speak to her! She will have no mercy upon me.”

“Not a word, Jenny!” cried Maud.

She rose and stood before William Spanswick, and laid her hand gently on his shoulder.

“Have more faith, man. I am not a poor woman. I say again that I will do all that I can for your daughter and yourself.”

“Let me go away with her, for Heaven’s sake!” he wailed forth.

“I am a paid servant of the institution, and your daughter is in my charge,” said Maud.

There was a long silence; the time-piece on the mantelshelf suddenly seemed to tick with noisy vehemence, and the sullen roar of the sea

to set in with greater distinctness. Time and tide were not waiting for this man's decision, though their voices asserted themselves clearly against the night's stillness, and reminded him of the misery of his position, and the inflexibility of this avenging Fate. He looked up at last with his face of a ghastly greenish hue, and with great beads of perspiration dotting his forehead and hanging from his shaggy eyebrows.

"I accept the responsibility, Miss Christopherson."

"That is well; I am glad."

She held both her hands towards him, and he placed his own within them as he rose with downcast, miserable looks.

"I do not believe in mercy—I scarcely hope to find justice," he said.

"Don't give way! Courage!"

He released her hands, turned to Jenny again, and kissed her. Then he passed from the room without another word, and went slowly down the carpeted stairs and into the square, where the rain was falling.

He was only fifty years of age ; but he looked seventy as he went on with a tottering step and head bent very low. He would have gone direct to his lodgings, forgetful of Marmaduke waiting outside for him, had not that worthy individual come suddenly behind him, and shaken him like a dog.

“Don’t do that!” cried Spanswick senior, turning round with blazing eyes, “or, in an unlucky moment like this, it is possible that I shall kill you.”

“What’s the matter? Where’s your senses? Where’s your coolness, that you talk so much about at times? You a philosopher!—humbug!”

“Right, Marmaduke. It is as well to be re-proved at times—I stand corrected,” he said, suddenly becoming cool, and grave, and rigid; “it is necessary to have our wits about us to escape penal servitude.”

“She knows all?”

“She knows enough, and she will tell all that she knows.”

“Then I shut up the Emporium to-morrow.”

“She wishes me to confess all to the committee at the Asylum, and trust to her entirely.”

“Yes ; that’s very likely.”

“Then she will take care of Jenny until she is a woman ; and if Jenny is provided for, what are you to me, or what am I to anyone?”

“Dashed if I know what you are talking about!”

“I might get off the Asylum business—I was a subscriber once, and sent them fifty pounds ; and she pretends to have interest enough to exert on my behalf. But that insurance on the life of that unfortunate cur, your uncle, eh ? Would the Committee of Insurance take the money back as restitution ?”

“I ain’t going to try them—I wouldn’t chance it, if I had the money.”

“Jenny might be a lady. The marble-hearted woman said to-night that she was rich, and would provide for her ; and that I should only drag the girl to my level if I took her from her. Why, it’s all true enough, but I don’t

like the woman—I can't trust her. Fancy coming out of gaol, and finding Jenny a second copy of her—cold, repellent, horribly pious, damnably uncharitable!”

“I would not trust her for half a minute. She's a spinks.”

“A stony spinks—right, my classical tally-man!” said William Spanswick; “and so that deterred me, for one thing, and the other was,—‘Honour among thieves.’”

“Ah! it's a noble maxim,” cried Marmaduke enthusiastically; “and Jenny, she——”

“It's all settled. We shall be there to-morrow.”

He pointed to the black sky, and the black tossing sea beneath it; and Marmaduke said,

“Where's that—France?”

“That's the darkness into which two people who love each other will disappear for ever. That's the responsibility which I accept and dread. But so much the better for us all—eh, Marmaduke?”

“Yes; so much the better.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFRAID OF HER.

JENNY SPANSWICK still sat on the couch with her arm spread over the scrolled head-work, and her face hidden from her friend. When she felt Maud's hand upon her head, resting there lightly and tenderly, she shivered—that was all.

“What, Jenny,” said a soft voice in her ears, “have I to ask you to take courage also?”

“No, no,” she murmured; “you don't know how brave I am.”

“Do you blame me for all that I have said? Have I been too hard and too exacting with him? Could I have said less to teach him what was right and honest?”

“No,” the girl replied.

“Perhaps I did not say it in the kindest way—mine is always a hard way—but I said it in the best way that I could, in order to touch a heart not naturally a bad one.”

“Oh! thank you very much for thinking so; for his has been a good heart, and his only hope of happiness lies in poor me.”

“We will make ‘poor me’ worthy of the new heart born with his repentance. I think that they will let him off—I am almost sure they will.”

Jenny moaned again.

“I did not tell him, Jenny—and this is a secret between you and me—but I will write to-night to the Asylum people, relate to them a long story, demand as a favour, which I have a right to demand, mercy towards this mistaken man; confess that, in my sympathy for orphans of all degrees and kinds, I have been in the asylum under false pretences too; and ask them to let me pay the money which they have lost by you. And afterwards—guess!”

“Guess—what?” said Jenny, looking up.

“Guess what is to become of you?”

“Ah, heaven help me, I don’t know.”

“And yet I foreshadowed to your father, child, that I was rich, and would protect you—very rich, Jenny.”

Jenny’s miserable face did not brighten at the intelligence. Her conception of what was very rich was limited perhaps, or there was no power in Maud’s picture-drawing to make her heart beat hopefully. She continued to look askance at her with the same dull apathetic indifference.

“I thought all this out in the afternoon, when we were coming home from that long drive which over-tired you, and from which you will not recover till to-morrow.”

“Oh! to-morrow,” cried Jenny, her face changing suddenly, and becoming full of pain, before it was hidden away from Maud Christopherson’s gray eyes.

“They will not hurt him, Jenny,” she said, patting her back, as though she were hushing off a refractory child to sleep; “I shall be a very

Amazon in his defence; although I have not told him all, to make his sacrifice too easy for him. And now—are you listening?”

“Yes, Miss Maud,” was the hoarse reply.

“He will be found—it is possible—some situation, clerkship, office-keeper—until you are a woman, and can share his home. You will be with me until that womanhood is reached, and I will be your sister, and, with God’s help, your true friend; for, Jenny, I have taken to you. When your heart turned to me in your illness mine was a dry and stony place in which no love existed; I wanted someone to believe in me, to trust in me; and seeing not in all the world one face that would brighten at the sight of mine, knowing what enemies my bad temper had created, and what false friends my money would place round me, I had grown sour and cold and sceptical. Perhaps I was vain enough to think that I was very good, and that it was unjust that people should think me very bad; who knows? And when you took to me”—here her hand, which had risen and fallen on the girl’s

shoulder, rested there in all affection—"and I was sure that it was not a fancy born of fever, I was grateful."

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me always, think of me always at my best, whatever happens," cried Jenny, suddenly sliding from the couch to the feet of her who had called herself the friend, and hiding her face in her lap, where she sobbed passionately and wildly, "oh, forgive me always, Maud, my wickedness!"

Maud Christopherson was startled by this abandonment to grief.

"Hush, child; this is very weak of you."

"Try and forgive me; always try and forgive me. For you were brave and kind, and I loved you very much, though I was ungrateful to the last."

"You are thinking of that secret which you hid away for the father's sake—wisely hid away, perhaps, until you knew me better. All forgiven, Jenny. There, we will say no more of this; this is sheer childishness, and you are

sitting up too late. All is forgiven, Jenny ; don't you hear me ?”

“ All ?”

“ Yes, all,” repeated Maud ; “ there is nothing more to tell me, is there ?”

“ Oh, no ; nothing.”

“ There, go to bed hopefully and prayerfully ; and when I have done all my work of letter-writing—it must be done to-night—I will creep in and see if you are sleeping.”

“ I will keep awake till you come,” said Jenny rising.

“ If you do, I will reward you with my blackest looks,” said Miss Christopherson, “ and you cannot conceive how very black I can be.”

“ Don't write to-night.”

“ Yes, I will. It is imperative.”

“ Surely to-morrow will do. How long will it take ?”

“ Half the night, perhaps. But, then, I am of a strong constitution, and hard work agrees with me.”

“ If you would only leave it till the morning !”

“Why, are you thinking more of my health than of your father now,” cried the governess.

“There, good night.”

“Good night, and God bless you, Miss Maud !”

“With a faithful friend—amen,” was the quick answer, as she opened her desk briskly, and sat down before it at the table.

Jenny Spanswick paused again at the door, then went across and kissed her suddenly.

“With a faithful friend—yes, I say that too. Forgive me ; don’t mind me. I am too tired to-night to know what I am saying. I am dead-beat.”

“That’s not a nice word, Jenny ; but then you have not finished your education. Good night again.”

Jenny went away, leaving the door ajar, which Maud Christopherson, sharp girl though she was, failed to perceive. Maud was anxious to begin her task, and little matters affected her not that evening. This had been a great and stirring day with her, and she had risen to the occasion, and had been great and stirring too. What a

day, to be sure!—what a memorable day, and how full of promise! She could not say now—as she had said more than once—that riches made of her life an inactivity. Here she was busy, and she rejoiced in hard work, and in the necessity for energy and calculation.

She wrote long into the night, as she had told Jenny that she should; and a fair picture was she in the lamp-light, bending over her desk; a pretty woman, full of thoughts which ennobled her, for they were thoughts for others, and not one for herself. She drew a picture of the repentant man coming back to confess, to make reparation for his deceit, and she implored, as an old subscriber, as the M. L. who had been a patroness of the establishment, for mercy towards the offender. She was a far-seeing woman, who thought all protestations might be unavailing without good works; for she wound up with a forcible argument—at which she smiled contemptuously—in William Spanswick's favour, and stated it was her intention to present another large donation towards the funds of the establishment.

“I am afraid that this is bribery and corruption, and that I am no better than I should be,” she said, with a comical sigh, as she rubbed her pink little ear with the holder of the pen; “but it is done, and they are not romantic folk who meet at the green-baize table in that ugly board-room.”

She reconsidered the paragraph, and then went on again, failing to perceive that the door was opening cautiously, and that Jenny’s white face and great black eyes were directed to her once more. Had she looked up and seen them she might have shrieked with fear, and yet have not been a coward. But she continued to write; she was absorbed in her subject, and unsuspecting of evil, although everybody said what a suspicious woman she was; and she did not dream of a figure stealing down the stairs, with hands clutching the balusters, lest it should fall headlong to the hall. She wrote on in Jenny’s cause, in Jenny’s father’s cause, whilst Jenny crept away from her; and it was not till a strange noise, as of a door closing softly below,

caused her to stop writing, and brought the first doubt and the first plunge to her heart.

Then it all came to her mind, the clear, incisive, and cruel conviction, of how unworthy all these people were of her interest. She sprang to her feet, and went swiftly across the room towards the French windows, which she struggled with impatience to open. It seemed a long while, but it was not an instant before she was on the balcony, leaning over the ironwork, and peering down into the square. A figure, as of a child, was running swiftly towards the main road.

"Jenny !" she cried, sharply ; but the figure ran on, and heeded not her wild appeal to stay.

"Gone, then," said Maud Christopherson.

She went back into the room, took up the heavy table-lamp, and crossed the landing-place to the room wherein she had thought Jenny Spanswick was dreaming away her fears. It was empty ; the bed had not been slept in that night ; and all that was left of her charge was one plait of dark hair, which had been

placed on the toilet-table. Maud Christopherson frowned at it, as though it had been a snake coiled at rest there, and then went back to the drawing-room with the table-lamp.

“No—no one trusts me,” she muttered. She took up the sheets of the long epistle to the committee of the City Clerks’ Orphan Asylum, and tore them into many pieces.

BOOK II

THE OLD ROMANCE.

CHAPTER I.

THE WOODLANDS.

IN the bright summer-time, and on such a morning as we look in upon the scene, The Woodlands, near Brayling, Dorset, was always at its best. The trees were green and fresh about the old red-brick mansion, the flowers on the lawns and terraces gave life and lightness to it, and the sea beyond was bright with golden ripples. In the winter months, when all these glories of nature had departed, when the sea was rough and angry, and myriads of bare branches shot upwards towards a cold gray sky, people said what a dull, bleak, miserable place it was, and wondered how its inmates amused themselves, shut from the little town of Brayling by two miles of rough cross-roads. And

yet there had been many happy days spent within the old walls by a family which had at last appeared to die out there ; and there were legends at Brayling of the warm hearts and generous hands which had appertained, almost as a family trait, to the Christophersons. Things had changed after the last Christopherson had been thrown at the hunt, and his widow had married young Lawson—who wanted her for her money, everybody said, although she was still a beautiful woman when she changed her widow's cap for a wreath and veil one morning—and Mr. Lawson, to say the least of it, was not liberal. The one Christopherson left, a pale pretty girl, was like her father in her ways, so far as money-spending was concerned, until she disappeared from the sight of the Brayling folk, and it was whispered in the town that she had had her father's spirit, and had found it impossible to live with the man whom she had been asked to call papa. After that there had ensued great changes in Brayling, many marriages and much giving in marriage ; the Law-

sons travelling about and leaving the house to servants ; the Christophersons dwelling still in a few retentive memories, but so wholly part of a past in which no one took much interest, that the span between them and the new life in Dorsetshire seemed greater than it was.

When the Lawsons came back, bringing Miss Christopherson with them like a valuable prize or a great prisoner captured during their travels, there was not much excitement in Brayling, which was a town famous for making butter, and thus had its own business to attend to. No one was very much struck with the change in Mrs. Lawson ; the great families in Dorset, though still on speaking terms—on speaking-trumpet terms, for they kept, as a rule, at a most inconvenient distance—had not taken to the new husband as they had done to the first, who was one of their “set ;” and Miss Christopherson herself had not been so much of a favourite that the young ladies of those families should run after her eagerly when it was told in the county that she had come home to

nurse her mamma. There had been a little visiting and a little company-keeping at Woodlands; for Mrs. Lawson fought hard for society still, and did not like lying on the sofa all day apart from life's frivolities; but Mr. Lawson was objectionable and disagreeable and conceited, and no one seemed to "hanker" after him very much.

The Lawsons had settled down in Dorsetshire, and all seemed as it had ever been to Maud Christopherson before she went away. She was eighteen years of age when that event occurred, and at twenty she had met them in Hastings, and made it up with them; and when her mother had had a sudden relapse—this was after Maud had been to London, and had had two or three interviews with the Directors of the Orphan Asylum, who were very polite to her, and very much astonished at a long story which it had been her duty to relate to them—she had been sent for and reasoned with a little, and alarmed a great deal, until she had lowered her flag of independence and

gone back to the old life. Not quite the old life, but a something so much like it, that it was hard not to rebel against it, and to show very often those terrible tempers which they who knew her had been so often shocked at. It was the old life with a difference; when family matters appeared approaching a crisis, the Lawsons always gave way now. That particular intention had been mistaken; that strange idea had been farthest from the thoughts of the stepfather; it was Maud's opinion which Mr. Lawson would prefer to consult on this or that question; and if Maud Christopherson, ever a woman on watch, had formed a wrong estimate of his wishes, why, he was sorry, and took every opportunity of showing for awhile how cruelly he had been misjudged, and how his dear wife felt with him and suffered with him. To adopt a vulgar phrase, Mr. and Mrs. Lawson understood their customer pretty well now. They were not great judges of character, and they had never attempted to analyse all the strange complexities of this girl's disposition;

but they knew that there were two things to be respected in her—the will of her own, which was difficult to influence; and that money of her own, of which a far-seeing father had left her sole possessor at an early age.

But Maud was not content at heart, though the quarrel had been made up; she was resigned to the old position, but she was never wholly satisfied with it. It was pleasant to believe that the mother trusted in her, and loved her better than she had seemed to do for a while after her second marriage; but she was still a mother difficult to please, a woman of many whims and strange vanities, and Maud had never been quite certain that Mrs. Lawson had been as ill and weak as she had appeared to be when the daughter's obstinacy gave way at the sight of her prostration. Maud thought at times of her independence, of her efforts to become useful to someone or something, of her fancy to be sought for herself and not for her fortune, of her strange yearning for one or two friends whom money could not buy, or loss

of money could not set apart from her. And it had all resolved itself into the old life, or a semblance of the old life, she thought sometimes with a throbbing bosom, and a wild desire to be quit of it; and she was expected to grow amiable with an eccentric and exacting mother, and with nothing but sycophants and money-worshippers at every turn of her path. Yes; perhaps there was one not so mercenary as the rest—an inoffensive gentleman, who had a title and a few bare acres; and he liked her in his quiet way, and had shown that he liked her by some sacrifices of late years, and by putting up with her stern, assertive manners with admirable complacency; and it was he, after all, of whom she thought more charitably,—when he was away from her in particular, and wrote her some admirable letters. This was the end of her ambition, she thought, with a shrug of her shoulders, when the old spirit of discontent came uppermost, as it would do, though she was partial to taking it by the throat, and endeavouring to stifle it; this was how it would

resolve itself, in due course, if he were firm to his resolutions, and came back true to a promise which he had made her, without requiring, like a generous man as he was, any promise in return. He would ask her again to become Lady Evesby, and she should take him, perhaps, poor as he was. It would be a new life for her ; she should love him in time, and make him a good wife ; and if the world said that she had bought a title with her riches, why, she should not care a great deal for the calumny, never having cared a great deal for the world.

These latter thoughts had pressed themselves into the foreground during the present summer, for Lord Evesby had written much of coming home, and neither Mr. nor Mrs. Lawson had any objection to urge against him ; a lord in the family was something to be proud of ; and Mrs. Lawson had wished the match more than six years ago, when her daughter Maud was only eighteen years of age. Gracious ! how dreadfully old the child was getting ! thought the mother, whose greatest horror was that of becoming “ dreadfully old ” herself.

Maud Christopherson, that bright summer morning, was not looking very old; on the contrary, looking better and even younger than when we knew her in service, under false pretences, at the City Clerks' Orphan Asylum. There was more colour in her cheeks. The Camberwell air, or the Camberwell authorities, or the various responsibilities attached to her position, or the long nursing of one Jenny Spanswick, who had ungratefully run away from her at a time when she was studying hard to render her future fair and bright, had kept her with a very pale and thoughtful countenance; and now there was a something younger in her altogether. It was not so stern a face, though she was not so much her own mistress as she had desired to be, and there *was* light and life in it, as befitted an heiress with whom a lord was in love. And it was a very sweet and refined face when its owner was at her best—meaning in her best temper—although Maud Christopherson when positively angry was positively handsome.

Her father had always maintained that his little Maudy was not a cross child, only a high-spirited one, and perhaps his humouring of her in everything until his dying day had not tended towards a flourishing crop of the amiabilities. And we are inclined to believe that Maud Christopherson was only high-spirited; she had no knowledge of tiffs; she did not try hard to render herself a nuisance in the family circle; she did not take airs on account of the worldly goods with which she was endowed; but she was strange in her ways, had a keen susceptibility which resented any attempt to mislead her, and at a real wrong to herself or to another she verged on the Pythoness. It was strange that no one gave Maud Christopherson so bad a character as she gave herself. She thought that she was cross, sullen, and unjust; and the morbid conviction had strengthened in her rather than grown weaker, that there was something repellent in her nature which engendered a distrust in the hearts of all who were brought into contiguity with her. But

she had become used to the position; she could not change her character, or feign love and admiration where she felt it not; there was this Lord Evesby to tell her sometimes that he considered her one of the best women in the world; and if he showed that he disliked her presently, it would be only the old rule asserting itself, and she should not protest against her fate. She was an odd woman altogether; she objected to being considered a religious person; she scarcely thought that with her "temper" she had a right to be called religious, and yet she was singular enough to think of the next world at times. There, my old friends and good readers, is the heroine of this story—a woman of twenty-four with a thought or two about heaven—strong-minded and serious, and yet not exactly the young lady who is great at Dorcas meetings and tract-societies, and has abjured the vanities of the world, and tells everybody so whom she encounters. Maud had not abjured anything, and was fond of the world after her fashion—she was at the Brayling ball

last February, and enjoyed her dances, and those partners who had not jumped on her toes or torn her flounces too much; and Mrs. Lawson, who was there also—she *would* go, though she sat and shivered all the evening after tottering through one set of quadrilles with Mr. Lawson—had said afterwards that Maud was the queen of that ball, and had as much attention paid her as she had had in her time when half the county was mad about her beauty. Not that the time was far removed from the present; but she had aged uncomfortably fast, and her knees would knock against each other when she took any extra exertion. She might get over it, and look better again—women of forty-five very often did—for her figure was good and her eyes were large; and if she could get her complexion round, she would be more like the old self to which she was reluctant to say good-bye.

The Lawsons were at breakfast in a handsome room, whose windows looked towards the sea, and opened upon banks of rich green turf

which sloped down to the terrace that stretched along the garden front. Letters and newspapers had arrived, and Mr. Lawson was buried in his leading articles, and was sour and grim-visaged over them as it was his wont to be.

Mrs. Lawson had risen early and contrary to her usual rule, having a new hope that early rising would bring her better health, as her doctor had intimated that it would; and Maud was at her side reading a letter which had reached her by that morning's post. It was a long letter, at which she smiled once or twice, at which she might possibly have even blushed, for Mrs. Lawson said languidly,

"From Lord Evesby, Maud, I suppose?"

"Yes, from Lord Evesby," answered the daughter; "he is coming back to-day after two years' absence from England. He will be here almost as soon as his letter."

"And you are glad, I am sure," said Mrs. Lawson, laying her hand upon her daughter's.

Maud did not answer readily, and Mrs.

Lawson repeated her question almost anxiously.

"Yes, I shall be glad to see him, mamma, I think," she said somewhat thoughtfully.

"And I am sure that he will be glad to see you," affirmed the mother; "that to-day will be one of the happiest of his life."

"What a little makes some people happy!" said Maud, in the same dreamy manner.

She was looking at the letter in her lap, and was not aware that Mr. Lawson had become interested in the conversation, or that his small black eyes had rolled themselves into their corners, and were regarding her furtively.

"I am not, as a rule, curious concerning your correspondence, Maud," said Mrs. Lawson, in a tone of great indifference; "but you are aware that for years I have been interested in Lord Evesby, and that his father and mine were great friends. And you know what I have always wished?"

"Yes, I know," replied the daughter.

"And may I see that letter, if it be not too

tender or romantic for a third person's perusal?" said Mrs. Lawson curiously. "I should like to judge for myself if his lordship's tone is as friendly as it should be under the circumstances."

"Under what circumstances, mamma?" inquired Maud, as she passed the letter to her mother. "You know that I have made no promise—that I am perfectly free, and that even his return, a repentant prodigal, does not bind me in any way to reward his new life with my hand and fortune. Does it, Mr. Lawson?"

She had caught sight of the bead-like eyes glinting at her sideways in their sockets, and Mr. Lawson jumped at this sudden inquiry.

"Well, no—no," he said airily, as he looked full at his paper again; "there is no contract, only a tacit understanding or agreement between you two young folk. He said something or other before he went away, didn't he?"

"Yes; but I said nothing—or next to nothing," replied Maud, with a reserve.

"Ladies can imply a great deal without say-

ing anything," said Mr. Lawson. After which oracular remark he dived head first into his newspaper.

Maud Christopherson thought that she did not like Lord Evesby quite so well after this. She did not wish to be talked into marrying a nobleman, and to become Lady Evesby, because her step-father desired it and her mother thought that it would add to the dignity of the family. She believed it possible that such a match might add to her happiness by taking her into a new sphere, and allying her to one who loved her a little; but neither mother nor step-father had said much about her happiness. Position, a title, influence in the county, had been dwelt upon with more or less of eloquence; but whether she should be happy was not on the cards.

After breakfast she wandered about the garden in a restless fashion that was new to her. In her quiet moods she was methodical enough, she believed; and though there had been nothing to greatly disturb her, she found it diffi-

cult to set about those portions of fancy-work and music-practice to which she had intended to devote herself that morning. She felt that she had a great deal to consider, a great deal for which to prepare, and that the next few hours were, for better or worse, to influence her whole after-life. For a man was coming back who would ask her once more to become his wife; and he was a man whom she respected, and whom she fancied, when she was a girl of seventeen, that she had almost learned to love. She would think it all over very deeply that morning, so that she should be prepared for him, and all that he might say to her; but, after reading his letter very attentively, she found that her mind wandered, and that a hundred thoughts connected with her pensioners and connected with the past, came between her and her best intentions.

When Lord Evesby arrived, which he did about half-past twelve that morning, she was no more prepared for him than she had been before the receipt of his letter; and perhaps it was

as well for Lord Evesby that such was the case. He came along the broad gravel-path which skirted the lawn beyond the terrace; and though she affected not to see him, she was conscious that her heart beat a little faster at his approach. She had always liked him, of course; he had been always kind and considerate to her, and had been only weak of purpose and extravagant of purse—no very great failings in a young man who had inherited “grand notions” from a father who had not been careful himself of that which had once been a good property.

“They told me you were here, Miss Maud,” he said, when he was close upon her, and she had risen from the rustic garden-seat to offer him a welcome back to Dorsetshire, “and I thought that I would come in search of you at once.”

“You are very kind, my lord,” Maud answered.

Foreign travel had agreed with his lordship, and Maud thought that she had never remembered his looking so handsome. Lord Evesby

was close upon thirty years of age—a few months more would take him for ever from those pleasant things, the “twenties”—and a man always looks best at that period, if his life has been honest and his liver is sound. He was bronzed with the sun, his blue eyes (which Jenny Spanswick had considered were washed-out-looking eyes), had deepened a little in some mysterious way, his long whiskers had even condescended to take a darker hue, and he had filled out by ever so little, and lost that slimness and angularity which had taken twenty per cent. off his *tout-ensemble*. Altogether a handsome man was Lord Evesby at this juncture; and he took his good looks becomingly, and with an easy grace and modesty which did not make an ass of him. Perhaps there was not a great deal of expression in the nobleman, and the small receding chin betrayed the weakness of his character too much; but it was a face that a great many women would have liked, and that a few men would have thought “not so bad.”

Maud did not resume her seat immediately. A consciousness of danger, of her own irresolution, and of a new kind of determination in him, led her to think that it was a better plan to talk of luncheon and a return to the house.

"I do not think that they expect us in doors at once," he said very politely at this hint. "May I ask you to keep me company here, and to bear with me a little? I have not seen you for so long—and you, I hope, are not afraid of me?"

"No; I am not afraid of you," said Maud, laughing.

She resumed her seat, and Lord Evesby took his seat beside her. He was very grave and earnest, he was almost business-like, Maud thought; and though she had laughed pleasantly at the idea of being afraid of her old friend, she was nervous of him just a little. She had always fancied that he was a timid man—a man to be checked by a word, and to render any amount of obedience at a given signal; it was his calmness and placidity that had been at

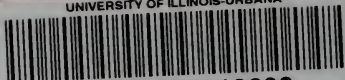
times unbearable, and she was a little surprised at his new manner.

It was somewhat odd for Lord Evesby to return after two years' absence, and to dash instantly into love-matters, as though he had prepared his speech, and was anxious to get it off his mind, no matter what might be the result of his precipitation. He was taking up a subject which had been dwelt upon the night he bade them all good-bye, and departed making many promises ; but she would have preferred its resumption at a more fitting opportunity, when they were less like strangers, when the natural reverse which two years' separation had made had passed away beneath the potent spell of old acquaintanceship. For an instant it almost made her suspicious of him—the man could not have had her on his mind so completely as all this ; and it was not absolutely necessary to dash at her as though he were afraid that in the course of the next few minutes she would make a strong effort to elude him.

“Maud,” he said in a low voice, “I wonder if you remember everything that passed between us when I went away from here last?”

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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